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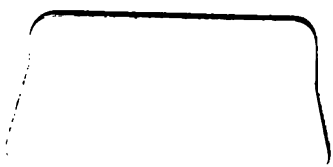

THE

MODERN UNBELIEVER.

BY EMMA NEWTON,

AUTHOR OF

DIFFICULTIES OF A YOUNG CLERGYMAN, IN TIMES OF DIVISION, &c.

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TO

HER FATHER AND MOTHER,

THE REV. DR. NEWTON, AND MRS. NEWTON,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE subsequent volume is designed as a familiar delineation of the unhappy tendency of "an evil heart of unbelief." It is scarcely necessary for the Author to say that it is not intended as anything in the shape of a *controversial* assault upon the principles of Atheism, Rationalism, Trancendental-Idealism, or any other *ism* that, under the mask of philosophy, may have exalted itself against the religion of the New Testament. In the following pages, she has simply attempted to trace the influence of such principles upon the *heart* and *life*. It is enough for her, that, if brought to the test of experience, they are found inadequate to the spiritual wants of fallen creatures—that although some, to whom *novelty* is as a Gospel, may gladly embrace sentiments, which afford them a pretext for dismissing from their minds the Divine authority of a religion which condemns the irregularity or frivolity of their lives, none has ventured on the rough journey of life, trusting to find the transcript of Truth within his own breast, and looking for no other support in the day of sorrow or of conflict, but the law

of an uncontrollable destiny, but has felt that the hope on which he has leaned, has wounded instead of sustaining him, and has lain down at last "wearied with the greatness of the way."

One thus stricken, even to the death, with the shaft which his own hand had pointed, the Author has attempted to delineate in the character of the Unbeliever. A man who, desiring to be led by the laws or instincts of his nature, began life firm in his purpose to become the arbitrator of his fate,—to "work and acquire" in his own strong "Will," and thus "chain the wheel of chance and always drag her after him;" but, blinded by those very instincts, the distrust of a naturally corrupt and suspicious heart, prepares for himself a hell of misery from the creations of his own fancy, and sinks at once into the abyss:—as if Nature were herself wearied of the presumption of his flattering adoration, and had arisen to vindicate the authority of Him, "the thunder of whose power" her deluded votary was unable to understand.

Of the causes which led to the publication of the narrative, it is unnecessary to say more, than that it is the most earnest wish of the Author, that it may find its way to the heart of one, who, perhaps even in early youth,

has forgotten the covenant of his God,—one who is already involved in the intricacies of life's fearful labyrinth, but who has lost the mystic thread or clue, by which alone he can be extricated—the faith of the Revelation of God.

ERRATA.

Page 8, line 20, *for* accusor, *read* accuser.
45, „ 26, *for* laid, *read* lain.
82, „ 19, *for* Monastecism, *read* Monasticism.
82, „ 20, 21, *for* hath planted, *read* had planted.
89, „ 18, *for* to the, *read* from the.
90, „ 1, *for* draws up, *read* dries up.
149, „ 21, *for ad libertum, read ad libitum.*

THE MODERN UNBELIEVER.

CHAPTER I.

"Nature is but a name for an effect, whose cause is God."

We doubt not but those of us who are familiar with the old coach road between Birmingham and Oxford, have noticed a substantial white stone house, which stands about fifty yards south of a pretty, rural village, the name of which we have just now forgotten. It has a somewhat antiquated appearance, and was once, we believe, the favorite villa of some wealthy alderman, but is now changed into a busy, bustling hotel,—its spacious rooms affording excellent accommodation for weary travellers, and its smooth green lawn cut up into potatoe fields or kitchen gardens.

It is not with the hotel, however, that we have to do at present, but with a certain grass grown lane, separated from the above mentioned building by a range of fields—cornfields they were, when we saw them last, and cornfields promising a good, old fashioned English harvest, though plentifully besprinkled with mischievous poppies, nodding their scarlet heads among the green grain, as conspicuously as if they had been plants of the husbandman's own planting. Well, in this identical lane, and beneath the shade of a grove of sycamores,

through whose wide spread arms, blinked the red evening light of the 29th of May, 18—, stood WALLACE ARNOLD, gazing earnestly into the eyes of the fragile, fairy-like little lady, who but yesterday had become his bride; while she, as if unheeding the passionate devotion that had filled the soul of her husband, gazed from him upon the extensive landscape, which stretched itself far off into the hazy horizon in the distance; and she thought of life, and death, and heaven, and the long, long future of human existence, which at that moment was stretched out in her imagination in colors just as fair and beautiful as the same green landscape; and she felt like a little child, when it looks up at the golden beams of the setting sun, and fancies them the windows of paradise.

But Wallace Arnold, whom, to prevent confusion, or otherwise misconception, we shall at once introduce to you under the designation of the UNBELIEVER, still gazed earnestly, as if he would see into the very soul of his beloved; and he thought of nothing but his beautiful bride, and felt nothing but the magic of her bright eyes.

The evening advanced,—Night hovered in the distance like a dim cloud—The sun sunk lower and lower as if stooping to embrace the earth—White mists began to rise and fold themselves in whimsical shapes in the twilight. Then, the fragile little lady coughed; and her husband laid his hand upon her shoulder, and in a tone of voice, deep, impassioned, earnest, he said, "Agnes, come with me."

The lady raised her eyes to his, but did not speak. She was watching a tiny, purple cloud which had been sail-

ing on and on in the calm blue heavens, like an island floating in some expansive ocean, and again her eye followed it, until the cloud became a little speck, and at length, melted away into the shadows of evening. Then, the lady spoke; and what do you think she said?—

"Wallace, I would rather," as Lord Bacon says, "I would rather believe all the fables in the legend and the Talmud and the Alcoran than that this universal frame is without a mind!"

The Unbeliever smiled, and he answered, "Are we not agreed, my dearest Agnes? What is that all-sustaining and vivifying power in nature, which I acknowledge, that soul of my soul, life of my life, mind of the universe, but the same unknown Eternal, which you adore as God. Come, lay aside your superstitious prejudices; forget that Mr. Smith or your other priests have taught you to regard me, and such as I am, as outcasts and reprobates; and in this holy temple of creation,—heaven above us, and around us, and within us —lay your hand upon my heart as your altar, and to the eternal defiance of bibles and creeds and church formularies, acknowledge that we are one in faith, even as we are one in love!" The lady shuddered, and withdrew her hand from his; but think you that the frown of a grim official of the holy Inquisition, of the sixteenth century, though with all his apparatus of torture by his side, could have imposed a silent acquiescence upon her, as easily as the appeal, the smile, the look of her husband? She turned away; and with an earnestness of manner and tone of voice so fervent and confiding, that

she seemed like a priestess of creation, standing there to give expression to the homage which nature around her offered silently, she answered, "Wallace, I believe in Jesus and the Resurrection."

A shade passed over the expressive countenance of her husband, but he quickly answered, "And I believe in the resurrection;—I believe that not a single atom in this beautiful creation shall be lost; but that that divine power which lives and moves in every thing around us, shall be the resurrection and life of the world. Am I not a christian?"—and he added, with some emotion, "Believe me, although I should decline using the same terms as yourself, my dear Agnes, I am far from being insensible to the truth of the sentiments which you have just uttered; and while I have been gazing with you upon this fair, quiet landscape,—which seems as if sleeping at our feet beneath the parting benediction of its own sunlight,—I have felt that there is a *divinity* in nature, a something, which a devotional mind like yours, must deify and worship as God."

"I have felt," returned Agnes, "that God hath not left himself without witness; but that the works of his hand are so stamped with the impress of his divinity, that, even those who reject the written revelation, are compelled to bow the head and worship the image of *his* power in the beauties of creation;—and altho' you will not look beyond the works of God to the great artificer"—

"It is one thing to look and another to perceive," interrupted Wallace, laughingly.

"Do you mean that we are not to believe in God

because we can't see him?" said Agnes. "Am I to doubt the existence of my own spirit,—the something within me that thinks, and wills, and loves, and hopes, —because I can't see it? Mind, you know, is essentially immaterial, and as such, it is incapable of being discerned by us except in its outward manifestation."

"Did I say so?" returned Wallace carelessly, "nay, I believe that this vast universe, and you, my adored Agnes, are but one"—continued manifestation of the Deity, he would have said, but Agnes stopped him. "The works of nature proclaim that God *is*. From age to age, this earth, with its evidences of design and its teeming fruitfulness, bears witness to the existence of some great first cause of all things. But further than this, except when viewed in the light of revelation, nature is silent. How little can we know of God—of his character, and perfections, and attributes—of his design in the creation of man,—without the aid of revealed truth! I look around me but every thing is in a mist—I was not— I am—I may soon cease to be for ever. Earth bore me into life and enjoyment, but to-morrow I may return to eternal annihilation within her womb. Generation follows generation to the dark grave. Life itself is a mystery, which can only be solved in death—and what is death? To man, in a state of primeval innocence, perhaps there might be no such obscurity. To him, I can imagine, that this earth might be as one spacious temple, full of the love and glory of the Creator; and he might worship God, either in the tranquil beauty of the summer's evening, or in the ma-

jesty of the storm or the whirlwind;—but now, the aspect of the world is changed, and a system of purely natural religion would do little to meet human wants, or allay human fears. We are ready to hide ourselves from the manifestations of Deity around us because *death* is in the world, and God hath encircled himself with a light which no man can approach but through that Divine person 'who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel.' How cheering is the light of revelation after the mists and twilight of human conjectures after God! How vague, and uncertain are our best hopes of a state of future existence, founded merely upon the analogies in nature; or as you have expressed it, upon the hope that not an atom in creation shall be lost! Who could endure to give up a friend, dear as our own soul, to the grave, were it not for the beautiful story of Jesus and the resurrection; which, no wonder, they who first heard it, hardly believed for joy? Oh, glorious Christianity! which alone can light up the darkness of the sepulchre; which can point us to a speedy re-union with all whom we have lost, and so break down the wall of partition between earth and heaven, that we cannot tell whether those who encircle us with their love here, or those who are our guardian angels there, are nearest us!"—

"You are hoarse, dear Agnes, we must return to the inn," exclaimed Wallace, "but, perhaps," he added, as she took his arm, "you have only talked yourself out of breath. Now, I will tell you, love—were the Christian religion that good thing that is represented in,

and by you, and not the idle rant and hypocrisy of the professing Christian church, I own, that though I might not believe, my heart would yearn towards it. Could I be persuaded that there is a moral power in Christianity capable of transforming and renovating the human heart, instead of making its professors tenfold more selfish and worldly minded than they were before."

"Have you," said Agnes, "had reason to think from your intercourse with Christian people that they are worse than others; or is it not rather the sanctity of their profession, which brings the slightest inconsistency in their conduct to light?"

"No,—it is not," said Wallace.

"Then," said Agnes, speaking gently and hesitatingly, as a woman should speak, "I should say that you have been unhappy in your acquaintance with them."

"My acquaintance with them has been extensive," returned her husband: "but think as well of them as you please, Agnes, it may be that you will go to heaven, blindfold, but should it happen that you are ever left to the tender mercies of religious people, you will find that you have tasted of the tree of knowledge, both of good and evil, and that it is bitter." Wallace stopped and his brow darkened. Agnes looked up, her eye met his and they both smiled. "Well," she said, "if you have been so unfortunate in your knowledge of professing Christians that you cannot point to a single example of real virtue amongst us, turn your eye at once from the disciples to their master. Look at Christianity as displayed in the holy life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look

at his benevolence; page after page, as I turn over my New Testament, I read of Him, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, cleansing the leper; exhibiting the proofs of His divine mission in acts of mercy and brotherly kindness; feeding the many thousand with a supernatural supply of bread when they were hungry in the wilderness, increasing the amount of wine at the wedding of Cana, &c. Then, think of his affection to his friend Lazarus—His sympathy at the house of mourning—His patriotism—His filial affection—His love to little children—His forbearance and tenderness with the guilty—with St. Peter and the unbelieving Thomas and Magdalene:—and, Oh, Wallace, there is one instance of our Saviour's pity for his suffering and erring creatures, so touching, so exquisitely beautiful, that I can never read it without tears—I mean, when He said to the unhappy victim of an unholy affection, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more;" and, as if in tenderness to womanly sensitiveness, silenced the clamor of her accusors by His abrupt appeal to their own consciences. How unlike the sternness and severity of a merely human lawgiver!"

"It is not from the morality of the New Testament that I turn away," said Wallace, "I love—I venerate the pure principles of truth delivered from the lips of the great prophet of Nazareth. The doctrines of His disciples, as embodied in the Apostolic Epistles, are however, as repulsive to my feelings as the Evangelicalism and the Methodism of our own day; and appear to me rather the fantasies of superstitious and ill-regulated

minds than the inspiration of nature."

"I don't quite understand what you mean by the inspiration of nature," said Agnes; "nor do I think that I shall be able to draw the line between the teaching of Christ and that of his Apostles, since the instructions of their master are only committed to us in the writings of his disciples. I cannot perceive the slightest discordance between the doctrines of the four Gospels and those of the Epistles. There is just this distinction:—the truths which in the former, are barely stated as matters of history, in the latter, are brought home to our own feelings. As to the morality of the Gospel, the high tone of Christian principle displayed, in the sermon on the mount, for instance, perfectly harmonises with that in the Apostolic directions given afterwards to the churches. Read the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and you will find that the same duties and graceful affections, which were enforced by Christ himself during the period of his ministry on earth, are explicitly enjoined by his Apostles upon the first Christian converts. It appears to me that one distinguished evidence of the divinity of our religion arises from its singular adaptation, even in its morality, to our wants and frailties. The God of nature is the God of revelation; and I know of no beautiful affection or virtue which gives a lustre to our character, or adds to our happiness, but it is not only sanctioned, but enforced, by Christianity. Unlike the system of the cold ascetic, it rather recommends the delightful interchange of feeling one with another, and the cultivation and enjoyment of friendship; and dreary

indeed, were our existence, had that Divine Being, who formed us dependent upon each other, commanded us to wander through life without the sunshine of affection.—

"Aye, affection," interrupted Wallace, "*love* has been given us, as somebody says, to hide the image of death."

"Rather say to point us to the resurrection," replied Agnes. "There are depths in the human heart which the voice of love and sympathy cannot reach—moments of darkness, when the mind recoils upon itself, and turns back the pages of its past history, and communes in its solitude. There is a journey which each of us must take alone. The hour must come when the ear shall be sealed against the voice of sympathy, and the bright eye filmed against the look of kindness, and the cold lips refuse to return the last warm kiss of parting affection. This must be the hour of nature's utmost emergency, and the God of nature, who knows what is in man, arms us for its approach, by meeting us in revelation as the Resurrection and the Life—the man, Christ Jesus, who went down to the grave, and rose again in our own flesh, and is become the first fruits of them that slept. Do you believe this, Wallace?" added his wife, looking him earnestly in the face.

"Go on, dear Agnes," was the answer, "I am never tired of hearing your voice; but you know I am not a believer, at least, not in your sense of the word. Can you not bear with my unbelief?"

Agnes turned away from the bright glance that accompanied the enquiry, for it made her feel that she

must bear with him.

"Let us talk of something else," said Wallace, "and meanwhile, we will hope that this difference of opinion between us upon so interesting a subject will be the means of increasing our affection, inasmuch as it gives us something further to wish."

The two walked on towards the white inn, but instead of talking of something else they looked into each others eyes and said nothing.

"This Mrs. Leonard Smith!" exclaimed Wallace, at length: "Have you answered her letter?"

"My dear, good Fanny!—I had quite forgotten her, but I will write this evening, and apprise the good people at Clifton of our arrival on Tuesday."

"—— take the good people of Clifton!—as you call them," said Wallace, sullenly, "I wish we were not going to Clifton."

"But, why not?"

"No matter."

"Wallace?" said Agnes, in her own soft, yet earnest tone of voice.

"Why do *you* wish to go?" said Wallace, "Richard will be in town shortly."

"Oh, for many special reasons."

"In the first place,"—

"And in the second place, and in the third place, I want to see Mr. and Mrs. Smith," said Agnes, laughing.

"Is it not very unlovely and ungracious in your friends at Clifton to attempt to alienate your affections from me, Agnes? pleading their own silly scruples, and—hang

their consciences!"—Wallace went on angrily, "What right have they to try to separate husbands and wives? Is this their Christian morality? Do not answer Mrs. Smith's letter at all."

But Agnes replied that she must answer it, and that Mrs. Smith was one of her earliest and best friends.

"I was wrong," said Wallace quickly, "but it is not strange that I, who love no living thing on earth but you, should be jealous of your intimacy with those who are trying to draw your heart from me. But I was wrong, I was selfish. It is natural that you should cling with affection to your more early,—possibly, your more amiable friends."

"What sentimental nonsense!" said Agnes, laughing. They had reached the hotel, and she imposed silence upon her husband, as they threaded their way amid a group of hostlers who were standing in front of the house. "And, now, Wallace," she added, "I will answer Mrs. Smith's letter, directly; and afterwards join you at supper. Say I may, Wallace—say yes."

The Unbeliever held her hand within his; as she spoke he clasped it firmer, but did not reply.

Agnes disengaged herself. "Farewell," she said, "just for one half hour, and I will send your—what shall it be?—kind remembrances to the good people at Clifton."

"Thank the gods, we are not to stay at Clifton long!" said Wallace, and with this thanksgiving he walked into the travellers' room, took up the "Jurist," and was soon occupied in some interesting discussion.

Agnes retired to her own apartment, threw herself

into a chair; and while her desk lay open before her, she rested her head upon the palm of her hand, as if the gush of pleasure's life blood gave her pain. She read Mrs. Smith's letter, and her eyes filled with tears; but they were not tears of sorrow or regret, but the overflowings of a sensitive and happy heart—tears which like the dew of the morning sparkle in the sunshine which absorbs them—then, she answered Mrs, Smith's letter. 'Out of the abundance of the heart,' Agnes both spoke and wrote; and the subjoined epistle is one thoroughly characteristic.

May 29th, &c.

"My dear Fanny,"

"The die is cast for better or for worse! Your kind and well-meant expostulations came too late. Yesterday, at the church of St. Austin, Wallace Arnold and I were united in the holy estate of matrimony. Henceforth, if you know ought against it, you are to hold your peace for ever, and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Can you not congratulate me? Oh, Fanny, say not one word more to throw a shadow across the sunshiny prospect before me. Even, should you still think that I have taken a step that will be fatal to my happiness, hold your peace, and—like a child who has wandered alone in the wilderness, and knows not that it is lost to its father's house, and to the voice of its brothers and sisters—let me still sport and trifle with the wild flowers around me, or fall asleep in happy unconsciousness of impending danger. You wish to know the particulars

of my acquaintance with Wallace. He was my father's pupil, and protègè, and my first recollections of him are associated with boxes of sweetmeats and playthings, which he was in the habit of bringing me in childhood; for he has known me from infancy, and is several years older than I am. When he left London, for the University, he was absent five years; and of course, upon his return, his little pet, Miss Agnes Fleetwood, had sprung up into a young lady. I dont know how it was, but we soon became wonderfully intimate. Wallace contrived some excuse to be at —— Square nearly every evening. My father patronised him, and liked him. I delighted in his society,—and altho' I only laughed at his ardent professions of attachment to me, regarding attentions of this kind from him, just as a matter of course, every day homage, like his daily supply of playthings when I was a child, I always thought him my best friend, and made him my *confidante*. It was not until after my father's death that we entered into a decisive engagement. I was then at Brighton, where Wallace joined me immediately. If this step were taken prematurely, remember, it was in accordance with my father's urgent wishes, expressed on his death-bed.

You are aware of the alteration in my religious sentiments that followed the death of my father. It was then that my situation appeared the most critical. My first impulse was to break off for ever, my connection with an avowed sceptic. But how could I?—Let your own heart answer the question. I sent for Wallace immediately. He was at that time pursuing his profes-

sional engagements in London, and we had a long and painful interview. Finally, it was agreed that all intercourse between us should be suspended during the interval of two years; and if, after the expiration of the term, we continued unchanged in affection, no further obstacle to our marriage should be urged. Wallace attributed all this to caprice on my part, or to—only guess what, Fanny—a secret *penchant* for Adolphe Montarre!—He left immediately for the continent. Can you imagine my feelings?

Two long, long years succeeded; and then, I received a highly formal note from Mr. Arnold, briefly expressing a wish to do himself the honor of calling upon Miss Fleetwood on the following evening, to which, of course, I replied, in terms equally ceremonious. O, the deceitfulness of our human nature! How I longed to see him; and yet, I could not help feeling nervous about the first rencontre—just the first look and smile. It seemed such an age since we had met. I felt a gloomy presentiment that he must be changed towards me, and all would not be right between us. He had seen so much more of the world than I had, and I fancied that it must have exercised its bleak influence upon him, and chilled his affection with its withering satire. I felt certain that we never should know and love each other just as we had done—that there must be a cloud between us—and oh, what a chilling, biting influence there is, in the first free glance of the eye that tells you that you are deceived—when your friend looks at you, but something at once reveals that the soul is not there; and you

feel that the warmth of glowing affection, which to you, gave life to the whole character is wanting.

Do you understand me?

Well, to-morrow evening came; and beneath the merry light of a certain gorgeous chandelier, which is suspended in our *salle a compagnie* in ———Square, Wallace placed his cold hand upon my heart, and our eyes met and vowed eternal constancy, in the first mute recognition.

We are married;—and I have received a most pressing invitation, from Mrs. Fleetwood, to spend the summer at the Old Hall; and so, my dear Fanny, I venture to look forward to seeing good father Smith, and hearing your own kind voice again, in a few days. I hope that Wallace and I shall yet spend many pleasant quiet evenings, at the Clifton Rectory.

My love to Mr. Smith, and the children. Mr. Arnold begs to be remembered to the good people at Clifton, with whom he hopes soon to be better acquainted.

Ever yours, faithfully,

AGNES.

But where is Clifton? and who are these good people, that we have so often mentioned? We will answer the question in our next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

"No one is so much alone in the universe as a *denier* of God. With an orphaned heart which has lost the greatest of fathers, he stands mourning by the immeasurable corpse of nature, no longer moved or sustained by the Spirit of the Universe, but growing in its grave; and he mourns until he himself crumbles away from the dead body."—J. P. RICHTER.

THE village which we have designated Clifton—albeit, it is not under this name that the inquisitive traveller must look for it—lies, somewhere, in the North of England, and not very far from the small manufacturing town of B——. It is situated upon the banks of a beautiful little river, which winds merrily along over its bed of shining pebbles, its progress occasionally interrupted, however, by massive fragments of solid rock, with their bald heads here and there relieved with tufts of green moss, or of river grass. On the south side of the river, just below old John Jackson's farm—a clumsy, red brick building, like a huge barn perforated with an array of small windows—are the stepping stones—a row of rude blocks, set in regular order across the river—and over this slippery footpath files of Clifton Laborers, bearing their implements of husbandry upon their shoulders, may be seen measuring their steps in the mellow sunlight of a summer's evening—their long, grotesque shadows pencilled out upon the surface of the stream below. Losing sight of the stepping stones, but still keeping by the side of the river, a white speck—which in the

distance you only took for, perhaps a stray sheep, which had wandered down from the surrounding mountains—assumes the form of an elegant little bridge. You cross it, and after tearing your way through thickets and brambles, beneath the shade of sundry dark woods, lo! you burst upon a beautiful panorama of smiling corn-fields and soft green meadows, intersected by picturesque cottages, and backed by a range of bleak hills—hardly hills—broken and disjointed masses of solid rock, tumbled about on the green earth, as if there had been, Heaven knows when, some mighty conflict,—some unnatural up-heaving revolution, even in the quiet bosom of nature.

And, now, you are descending into the village of Clifton, and before you stands the church,—a quaint, old gothic building, seemingly under the graceful patronage of its bushy yew—a tree, which having bid defiance to the storms of centuries, and thrown its friendly shade over the last resting-place of fathers, and forefathers, is now looked upon by the natives of Clifton with a sort of tender veneration, and associated with their religious feelings, until the Clifton yew has become to them, like state patronage to some of us, a sort of necessary appendage to the church that must not be meddled with —a something "good and useful," of which we say in our hearts, "destroy it not for a blessing is in it." Not far from the church stands the Rectory, the home of quiet and devoted hearts, and then, after passing several rural farms, and two or three villas, you reach the residence of Richard Fleetwood, Esq., which stands alone in its wide extent of park and pleasure grounds, as if in

all the far famed aristocracy of old England; and in distinction from several upstart halls, which have lately sprung up in the neighbourhood, is dignified with the appellation of the Old Hall.

Now, as we have much to say respecting the good people of Clifton, and especially of the inmates of the Rectory and the Old Hall, we will not enter into any further description either of the village or of these respective dwelling-places, but only request you, if you have read in story books of antique parsonages and old fashioned country houses, or seen them, in our beautiful English villages in your intercourse with real life, to bear them in mind when you think of the Rectory and the Old Hall.

Richard Fleetwood was the only son of the late learned, but eccentric, Richard Arthur Fleetwood, M.D., L.L.D., F.R.S.,—of unenviable notoriety, as a *freethinker;* and Agnes, who has already been unceremoniously introduced to you, as the bride of Wallace Arnold, was Dr. Fleetwood's only and fondly cherished daughter. Richard was twelve years his sister's senior, and from the death of his mother, which event took place at Clifton, he made choice of the Old Hall as his residence, married, and settled down as a quiet, country gentleman. Richard possessed a tolerably large share of what is termed common sense, this good thing being, in his case, united, as it sometimes is, with a very moderate proportion of other mental qualifications. The principles of his father were his soul's abomination. He had been educated at the Grammar School of ———, where

he early imbibed a profound respect for the theological opinions of his teachers, and learned to talk largely of our English constitution and our Protestant church. His religion, we fear, extended no further. Query, whether the noisy professor of Christianity, whose daily practise is a libel upon his principles, is not a more dangerous enemy to the truth than the avowed Atheist?

As for Mrs. Fleetwood, she was a graceful and accomplished little woman, but withal, thoroughly selfish, and worldly-minded. Her mental constitution,—either naturally, or because moulded of soft and pliable material, it insensibly took its form from those with whom she was most brought in contact,—had become the very counterpart of the soul of her husband. In a word, Richard and his wife were alike common-place characters; but who shall say that they were not the happier for this assimilation of feeling.

Agnes had always resided with her father. We do not mean any disrespect to the paternal feelings of Dr. Fleetwood when we say that she was his favorite child. Perhaps this partiality arose from the circumstance that she inherited his own peculiarities of taste—his love of literature and aptness to study, or perhaps from Agnes' confiding disposition and personal attractions: for who has not observed that it is a very common thing for a beautiful girl to possess a peculiar ascendency over the hearts of her relatives of the other sex. Be this as it may, Dr. Fleetwood idolised his daughter, and Agnes doated upon her father; and happy, as the earth in spring, were the years of her early youth and child-

hood, which passed when she was under the paternal roof, at ——— Square.

But Dr. Fleetwood died when Agnes was only nineteen years of age. The circumstances attending his death were somewhat singular. He had been confined to his room by a slight accident, from the effects of which his medical attendants looked for no serious consequences, when some unexpected relapse, brought him, at once, beyond all hope of recovery. Although a professed and determined unbeliever in the truths of revealed religion, Dr. Fleetwood heard the decision of the physicians upon his case with his characteristic fortitude. Almost immediately afterwards he desired to see Mr. Arnold. Wallace was instantly summoned to his room. "You see before you, Arnold," said the old man, raising himself upon his elbow as his protégé approached his bed-side, "a dead man—a moth—a mere butterfly, about to turn again into its state of torpid death, until spring shall bud and daisies blossom over the green grave!"—

A shade of thoughtfulness passed across the brow of the young Barrister, as he gently removed a labelled bottle of medicine from a chair that stood by the bed, and sat down, in front of his friend. "What new manifestations of life I may have to pass through," persisted Dr. Fleetwood, in slow and measured tones, "who can tell! Ah, I think I feel the earth-worms feeding upon me—living upon me—drawing life from my life, until they, too, return to their mother earth, and she travail again with fresh and fresh forms of life,—and again

feed them with her nightly dew or her morning sunshine. What am I now, with all my world of hopes and conjectures, more than yonder tiny fly that is trying to penetrate its wiry legs through the down of my bed-quilt, or the oysters that have been opened for my gratification, but an hour since when my heart was warm with visions of many years!"

"Poor thing!" exclaimed the attendant nurse, who had remained in the room, sighing as such persons do sigh habitually, and turning to Wallace, "He is getting quite light headed! Should I send and fetch a minister do you think?"

"Hang the whole fraternity of them! and send that old doating fool out of the room," exclaimed the feeble patient. "Will you not let me die in peace, without either the superstitious mummery of priestly absolution, or the bewildering attentions of some inquisitorial methodist? Let me quietly return to that state of eternal sleep, from which no restless somnambulist has come back to tell his dreams."

Wallace motioned the nurse to withdraw, and she reluctantly obeyed.

"And, now, have you nothing to say to me, Arnold?" asked the old man.

It was a dull, heavy, November morning; but at this moment a ray of Heaven's own sunlight looked through the gloom and fell softly upon the bed of the dying man. Wallace turned away his head, for his eyes filled with tears.

"You fool, you womanly fool!" said Dr. Fleetwood,

impatiently, "Is this the way you cheer your best friend in the hour of final separation! Are you still doting after your nursery superstitions! What is death that we should turn away from the contemplation of it, or what is life that we should cling to it? Death is but the quiet sleep of nature after a day of weariness. I would return to the bosom of earth, like a child to the embrace of a mother."

"Aye," said Wallace, to himself, "but if nature be our mother, why do we shrink instinctively from her arms?" He checked himself, and pointing to the window, reminded his friend of the dying words of Goethe, —"More light, more light."

"What did he mean?" said Dr. Fleetwood, as if he did not expect an answer.

"Light was his element," said Wallace; "and perhaps he shrunk from the film of death, which was then slowly stealing over his eyes"

"But did not he mean more?" interrupted Dr. Fleetwood, "Did not his enquiring soul shrink rather from that natural darkness which appeared to him as the faithful type of that abyss of uncertainty into which he was sinking? 'What is truth,' was the problem proposed to the man of Galilee, and generations have been trying in vain to solve it ever since. Wallace," he continued, and here, his voice softened, "I should like to have lived a few years longer for the sake of my child. It is hard to leave her in the bloom of her life's promise and meet no more for ever."

Wallace was silent, and although in the chamber of

death, this abrupt allusion to Agnes brought a flush of human affection into his face.

"When I am dead—and buried—and forgotten"—added the old man, after a long pause, placing his hand upon the arm of the barrister, "you will marry Agnes."

Wallace made no reply. For a few seconds his expressive eye sunk, and his strong arm trembled in the grasp of the emaciated invalid. "You will marry Agnes," repeated the old man, firmly, "and although I had lived, I could not have prevented it. Agnes has always been a girl of religious feeling. She does not like your notions. She does not know that she likes you, but her whole soul is in your power; and although she may neglect you, for a while, you will ultimately succeed. A knowledge of human nature is the spirit of prophecy,—but enough. In that desk," and here he pointed to an iron case in a corner of the room, "will be found my Will. Have you any thing to say respecting these things?"

After reading the documents in question, Wallace suggested some trifling alteration.

"Very right," said Dr. Fleetwood I have sent for my attorney, and he will be with us directly. And Wallace, as it must be, let it be under my own sanction. I will not leave Agnes in a state of unsettled feeling. Go to Brighton to-morrow—I shall not survive the night —and let *her* believe that I was favorable to it—that my memory may be embalmed within her heart."

Wallace looked up and his eye flashed fire.

"Life and death," said the invalid, "love sports over

the charnel house, and points his arrows with dead men's bones. Wallace, it is quite dusk—fetch my child for I am becoming cold and sleepy—and—and—draw up the blind for the room is dark—it is night, Agnes will be in bed."

"The Attorney, the Will!" exclaimed Wallace, rushing to the iron chest—"the key! Nurse! is Mr. ——below? he is wanted directly."

Mr.——— hurried up stairs—only a few seconds had elapsed, but now Dr. Fleetwood's hand refused to hold the pen.

"The Will, Sir!" said Wallace, in a voice of thunder.

The old man opened his heavy eyes, and assisted by his servant, with a last effort traced his initials upon the paper. There was a dead pause for a few moments, and then Dr. Fleetwood desired his attendants to stand back and open the window. They obeyed. "He is pressing upon me—he is suffocating me—he is smothering me with bolsters that he may obtain my child!" gasped the old man.

"Who?" said Wallace, earnestly.

"Wallace Arnold!" said the dying man; "I will curse him with my last breath—stand back—stand back —stan—"

"Doubting—distrusting, and even *me*." said Wallace to himself, and he hurried from the room as Dr. Fleetwood breathed his last. "Ah," he exclaimed, bitterly, "he hated me from the day that he saw I loved Agnes. He has concealed it long, but the truth comes out—he could not die *a lie*. *I* am born to be hated and distrusted

—it is always so."

* * * *

It always was, *just so*, with Wallace Arnold. He was not one of nature's spoilt children. An orphan, without friends, or connections, he had been thrown upon the world for protection from his cradle, and the world had been to him, a hard, a very hard school-mistress. From the arms of his nurse—the only person, save one, who had ever spoken to Wallace in terms of feminine endearment—he was placed by his guardians at a large public school, and under the protection of an entire stranger; from whose unkindness, whether intentional or otherwise, he had no appeal on earth except to the sympathies of little boys like himself, children, who could not help him in his early troubles, though they often tried, and whose tales of home, and holydays, and Christmas games, and fireside comforts, only filled his heart—yet warm in all the guileless affection of childhood—with fresh sorrows; for home, Wallace had none, and holydays were his most dreary hours of study.

Childhood passed, however, and was followed by youth and manhood;—for Wallace lived, and grew up, as we have seen. His strong constitution was not broken by neglect and ill usage, nor his manly spirit crushed by repeated provocation; but the gloss of a warm and generous nature was blunted by disappointment, his best and holiest affections stained by unworthy suspicion and jealousy; and he lived as his friend Dr. Fleetwood died, in distrust and unbelief.

In person, Wallace was tall and well-made, his hair

and eyes dark, and his mouth, which happened to be the most expressive feature of his face, heavy and Egyptian. He was far from what might be considered handsome, in the strict sense of the term, but his appearance was so striking, that he could not pass, even in a crowd, without being noticed. The expression of his countenance was variable as an April day. When dissatisfied and irritated, his brow darkened, like a gathering storm, and betrayed little less than envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness; but a single bright thought, or a look from Agnes, would at once awaken a fresh tide of fine feeling, and light up an expression of sympathy and affection.

We must not pass over this brief sketch of Clifton, and the good people of Clifton, without bestowing a word upon the Rector, who had married the early friend of Agnes. Mr. Smith—Don't be startled at the name, there are more Mr. Smiths that are Rectors in villages than one. Mr. Smith was a man of high family and very fair mental endowment. He was educated for the Church, entered Holy orders at the usual age, and was in the midst of a brilliant career at the University, when, to the surprise of his friends, he at once took leave of his beloved and venerated *Alma Mater*, accepted the living of Clifton, (which between us, is only a lean benefice) married, and has since remained in the seclusion of his own parish, unknown and forgotten, except among his own family and parishioners. But, although Mr. Smith lived in retirement, he did not live for nothing. As a minister, he was eminently useful and devoted, and we

will venture to say that in the domestic circle he was exceedingly happy and beloved. As to the minute peculiarities of his creed, or the shibboleth of his party, we will not enquire; Mr. Smith was a Christian, and manifested the truth of the religion he professed "both by his preaching and living."

But it is time that our acquaintance should again speak for themselves.

Bless good Mr. Nehemiah! What are we doing to forget Nehemiah? a native of Clifton, and once, the village Surgeon, too. And yet, much as we love the warmhearted man, and often as we have seen him, standing by the bedside of some poor abandoned one, in his Quaker's coat and broad brimmed hat,—the truth and earnestness of his nature speaking out, even in the quaint peculiarities of his phraseology—he is, precisely, one of those characters, which we dare not take it upon ourselves to delineate, any more than we would attempt to paint sunshine, Mr. Nehemiah is no sculptured saint upon a pedestal, but a man—a living man, with hopes, and fears, and infirmities, such as this mortal flesh is heir to; and moreover, with certain badges of humanity in the shape of a brown coat without a collar, &c. Still our busy imagination has so associated him with mighty enterprises, and holy achievements, that he appears to us as the "Great-heart" of his own generation, sent to conduct our many "Little-faiths" through their "valleys of Baca" and "Forgetful-greens," to the "Celestial City,"

Good Mr. Nehemiah! Peace be unto him. It might

be that with him Nature and Providence have alike dealt so very gently, that his beaming smile sits upon him with the same sunshiny placidity, with which we venture to say he received his mother's kisses in infancy, and his mild blue eyes are yet a beautiful index of the calm unruffled spirit that reigns within him. It might be that his path through life has hitherto been undisturbed, and his child-like spirit never awed by violence, or subdued by sorrow; and that he is going to Heaven, as it were, with his bark in full sail, all firm, and right, and beautiful, as when he left the port, and the winds are soft and propitious, and the ocean of life is calm, and the blue horizon around him and above him is unsullied by a single cloud. It might be so, we say, but our friend Nehemiah was a Christian, and a philanthropist; and we leave it for you to determine whether any have attained to true moral greatness and strength of character, who have not drunk deep of the cup of life's bitterness, and been baptised with the baptism of sorrow.

CHAPTER III.

"A little lowly hermitage it was,
Down in a dale, hard by a forest's side,
Far from resort of people that did pas
In travelll to and fro a little wyde
There was an holy chappel edifyde."—

Now, it happened, that on the evening of that identical twenty-ninth of May, on which our bride and bridegroom were talking over their friends at Clifton, as they walked together in the grass-grown lane behind the corn-fields, that, as if reciprocally, the worthy Rector of Clifton and his lady were discussing their friends in the lane, or as they imagined in London—certainly not beneath the soft blue evening sky, and amid the beauties of nature, though the sun shone as merrily, and the landscape was as green in Clifton as in Warwickshire—but within the four corners of an attic nursery, and surrounded by their five busy, buoyant, prattling little Smiths.

Here, in the third or fourth story of the Rectory, for reasons which Mrs. Smith had explained at some length to her husband, but which, we believe, may be summed up, at once, in the fact that the twenty-ninth of May was a holiday at Clifton, and she had allowed the servants to go and see somebody's menagerie, the lady was detained with the children. And, she had told them the story about poor King Charlie climbing into an oak, &c., at least half a dozen times, and was just beginning

it again, when Mr. Smith found it necessary to come up stairs, to announce the arrival of a personage of no less importance than the milk-man. Contemplating a speedy retreat to his study, the Rector of Clifton remained standing, and held his pen in his hand; but Mrs. Smith prevailed upon him to stay, for at least one minute, while she rehearsed a certain report, which had already obtained almost universal credit in the village, no other than that Miss Agnes Fleetwood, Mr. Fleetwood's only sister, had become the wife of Mr. Wallace Arnold.

"It is village gossip—it is nothing but village gossip," said the Rector, at the same time stooping to kiss a little flaxen headed Smith, who was waving a branch of budding oak, and babbling out that he was King Charlie. "But, Fanny, dear, there is the milk-man below."

Now, Mrs. Smith knew very well that new milk is the essential aliment of babes like hers, but yet, at that moment, she could have wished the milk-man anywhere else but at the kitchen door of the Clifton Rectory; and turning to her husband, she suggested that he should take the milk himself.

Mr. Smith looked wonderfully distrustful of his own powers. Perhaps he thought that *taking the milk* signified nothing short of appropriating to himself, in one copious draught, the contents of the huge tin can. He shook his head, and declared with the most consummate gravity, that the thing was impossible. As the necessary alternative, Mrs. Smith told him that he must "take baby;" and baby, white frock, white cap, and red coral —we dont know how to describe him better—was com-

mitted to the care of the Rector, while his wife ran down stairs and disposed of the milk.

Presently Mrs. Smith returned to the nursery and resumed her charge, but looking at once gloomy and thougtful, and as if, as the Rector expressed it, it were dull November instead of May. "What do you think that gossip of a milk-man told me at the door?" she said. "'I *hear* a great deal and *say* nothing, you know, Mrs. Smith,' he began—and, Oh! Leonard! look what you have done." She seized the pen from her husband's hand, and sending it fluttering and shaking from the room window to the grass-plat below, pointed with her finger to the infant's white frock. It was certainly defaced with four distinct marks of blue ink. Mr. Smith remembered that he had seen some salts of lemon, or patent scouring drops, somewhere in a closet in his study, and was preparing to go and seek them, when his wife eagerly recalled him. "Never mind the ink, Leonard, never mind the frock, washing day will come in its turn; but poor Agnes Fleetwood, they say that she was married yesterday, and to that man. They say so at the Hall, Leonard."

"Then I should think that it is quite correct," said Smith.

"You should!—Well, if she do marry him, she will forfeit *my* respect, and affection, and every thing. *I* shall have done with her. I dont think that I'll speak to her."

"Now you are talking at random," said the Rector, in his own quiet tone and manner, "I am sure you don't

mean it seriously. Poor Agnes! it is well that she can appeal to a higher judgment than ours; but it shall make no difference with me; I shall like her as well as ever I did," he added, with emphasis, "though I strongly object to the connection."

Mrs. Smith's irritation of feeling had died away with the words which had given utterance to it, and now she echoed her husband's sentiments. "Oh! and I shall like her as well as before, too, Leonard. I did not mean it seriously. But, that letter,—I wish I had not written it. If Mr. Arnold should see it—"

"You did not read me the letter, Fanny," said Smith.

"No, I was afraid that you would not let me send it, and I was resolved to tell Agnes all my mind."

"And you told her more than 'all your mind,' as you told me just now?" said the Rector enquiringly.

A shadow of uneasiness passed over Mrs. Smith's countenance, but she exclaimed, "No, I only delivered my soul, as our friend Nehemiah would say; I have kept a copy of the letter and you shall hear it directly."

"Have you ever seen him, Fanny?—I mean Mr. Arnold," asked Smith.

"Have n't I seen him!—yes, I have seen enough of him," replied his wife; "did I not tell you that he called upon us the last time that I was in London, two, three years ago, before baby was born, before Arthur was born, either. Of course, I had not the most remote suspicion that Agnes liked him"—

"No?"

"No!—Who could even dream such an odd thing?

I'm surprised at you, Leonard. One night, I and Agnes were sitting alone in poor Dr. Fleetwood's library. I shudder to think of that library, for there were those human bones and skulls, and ugly fossils, and stuffed alligators, all huddled together in a closet—but I had not seen them, then, and Agnes had asked me to come into the room, to look at some new prints. Well, we were busily engaged in turning them over when we heard some one tap gently at the door, and a tall, stern, black looking man, with eyes like two live coals, and a bitter ghastly smile that made me think of Milton's Satan"—

"Hush Fanny," interrupted the Rector gravely.

"He entered the room, came straight up to Agnes, and leant against her chair, and she talked to him as familiarly as if he had been her brother. Then, he turned to me and asked if I would see—something, but I did not distinctly hear what; so, I said, yes: and, all at once, he threw open a closet door and displayed such a collection of bones and fossils and—a skeleton! Altogether, the sight was so awful that I screamed."

"No?—How foolish!"

"Not at all foolish, I should like to know who could have helped screaming."

"Well, go on."

"The ungentlemanly creature apologised; yes, he did apologise, and looked me in the face and smiled, or rather 'grinned horribly,' that same bitter, despairing smile. He closed the closet door, and inclining himself, in a slovenly attitude, against the chimney-piece, where he could look straight at Miss Fleetwood, (*I*

thought that highly impertinent I remember) he began to talk about animal life, and organization, and the eternity of matter, in a way that actually made my hair stand on end."

"Indeed!"

"Now, Leonard, don't be foolish. I listened to him until I had lost all patience, and as I knew that Agnes had, even then, a great respect for religion, I told him my mind about talking in such a way."

"What did Mr. Arnold say, then?"

"Threw me a glance from those glaring cats' eyes that nearly withered me, and bit his lips, and was silent,—looking like the thunder storm. Agnes thanked me for putting a stop to what she termed speculations or something, and told Arnold that he talked like an Athé; and then, if he did not leave his chimney corner, throw his arm around her chair—I thought of Eve and the toad, and the whispering, but never that Agnes was in love with such a creature—and he apologised so earnestly, and his manners became so tender, and beseeching, and winning; and he quoted scripture, too, and talked about religion, so nicely, that you would have thought that he was a Christian, but *I* did'nt; I knew better, although he left the room, exclaiming, I am aware that Miss Fleetwood is a Christian and I am a Christian. That's the story of my first interview with Mr. Wallace Arnold, and I hope it will be the story of my last. Agnes seldom mentioned him to me afterwards. Poor girl! I wonder if he will tease her and argue with her."

"Anyhow his influence must be injurious to her," said Smith, turning from his wife to the window, and singing the old Hundred, as he often did when musing. "She must be upon her guard," he added, after a short pause, "for she will be introduced into a new circle, as the wife of Arnold, and a circle which is not only destitute of all religious feeling, but where, I fear, that she will find the tone of morality itself depraved and vitiated. A circle, in which, even the outward decencies of prayers and church-going are often disregarded, those things which she holds most dear and sacred thrown into contempt; and the most beautiful relationships of human life often first degraded into matters merely conventional and then followed by some base intrigue."

"But, Arnold's principles"—Mrs. Smith began,—

"As to Arnold's principles," interrupted the Rector, "I did not mean my remarks to be invidious, but—Nature is but a blind guide to follow, even with all her beautiful instincts, and when divested of her prospect of immortality, she is, I fear, like Sampson on the lap of Delilah, enervated, inactive, shorn of the mystic lock wherein her strength lieth. Wallace Arnold, if he be a disciple of poor Fleetwood, is not a Rationale or a Unitarian or a Deist but a confirmed Atheist, one who,—from the first blossoms of hope which he may have put forth in his infancy, to the last faint desires after immortality which have fallen to the ground like faded leaves in the frosts of winter,—has shaken off all, and now lies, like a withered branch, a smitten, sapless

thing, to which spring shall bring no returning resurrection of life. Give me any system of rationalism in preference to that repulsive scheme of philosophy, which acknowledges no immortality but that of the children unto the third or fourth generation, no eternity but the eternity of matter, no worship but hero worship, no God but Man. It is this system which tramples our nature in the dust by proposing to elevate it to Heaven; casting off the strongest motives either for intellectual or moral exertion, which are called forth in the notion of future rewards and punishments; and blighting our affections and friendships with the prospect of one cold, dreary night of eternal forgetfulness."

The loud peal of bells, from without, interrupted him. The children ran to the window, and the Rector and his wife exchanged glances.

"Then, they are married," exclaimed Smith, "and may Heaven's sunshine bless them for ever, as it blesses us to-day! Come, Fanny, let me see this letter that you have written."

Mrs. Smith despatched one of the children for her writing desk. A copy of her letter to Mrs. Arnold was produced. It was written in Mrs. Smith's own easy artless style, and the Rector read it aloud, and without any disapproving comment.

Clifton Rectory, May 28th, 18—

My dear Agnes,

Mrs. Pye has been here this morning. You know what a gossip she is, and how often you and I have smiled and yawned at her long stories. Well, if she has not

been telling me that you are married! married this very day, and to that Mr. Arnold. Of course I did not believe it. I cross-questioned and contradicted, and contradicted and cross-questioned, and said that if you were engaged, I was sure it was to Mr. Montarre, the young foreigner I have sometimes seen at the Hall. But Mrs. Pye, as Leonard says, adhered to her text—it was Mr. Arnold the Barrister—and she had it from Mrs. Jones, herself, who in strict confidence had it from Mrs. Simms, &c., &c.; and in short, she persisted that it was perfectly correct.

Write to me by return, dearest Agnes. Let me know how you became so intimate with Mr. Arnold,—if he have made his appearance again in London after his continental tour,—and all about it. But I cannot I will not believe it. Surely you would have trusted the friend of your early youth with an event which so materially involves your happiness, for both this world and the next. There is no need for anything but the most transparent confidence between us, and you cannot love me the less for warning you against a connection with an avowed atheist. Oh, my dear Agnes, do not tell me that he is so ardently attached to you. Is it thus you can trifle with your eternal interest? Have you forgotten that the marriage compact is binding "till death us do part;" and are you willing to unite yourself irrecoverably in time, to one, from whom you shall be for ever separated in eternity? For our sake, as well as for your own sake, give him up—Oh, give him up. Let him marry some cold-hearted free-thinker like himself; for what sympathy

can you have with a miserable infidel?—"What fellowship hath light with darkness, &c." Mr. Arnold will sneer at everything you hold sacred. He will not trust you, and you will not trust him, and you will be unhappy,—Oh, so wretchedly unhappy,—and—but I turn away with horror from the fearful prospect. There is not—there can be no truth in it. You have resolved to break it off,—and you will come to Clifton and pay us your long promised visit, and we shall talk it over by our own fireside, and sing—

'Rest my divided heart'—

as we sometimes did last winter; and Leonard and I and my boys will do all we possibly can to make you happy; and you will never—never—never regret that you are not united to an unbeliever. When may we meet you at B——with the old white horse and 'family gig?'

Ever your affectionate,

FANNY SMITH.

CHAPTER IV.

"She turn'd
To him who was to be sole shelterer now,
And placed her hand in his."

It was a festive day for Clifton when Agnes and Wallace were expected at the Old Hall, and again merrily—aye, right merrily were the village bells rung; and many a good and earnest wish ascended from the hearts of the villagers, as they kept holiday in their cottages or farms, and drunk to the health of the bride and bridegroom, in bowls of brown cider, brewed and bottled by Mr. Fleetwood's own butler.

As to the Old Hall, we doubt not but it was one unvarying scene of bustle and excitement. Every thing was in preparation, and every body was 'up and doing,' even from early day break; and how did eyes sparkle, and hearts beat high with anticipation, when poor Dr. Fleetwood's old travelling carriage,—its shining yellow front, and two white horses, just discernable in the dusk of the evening,—was seen winding its weary way along the avenue. Dinner was announced. The huge bell at the top of the house was made to shake its heavy tongue as clamorously as if it had life, and were hungry. Servants passed and repassed with dishes, and the atmosphere of the long dining room became savoury with soups and venison. Richard Fleetwood and his wife

and guests waited anxiously for the appearance of the Bride; and at length the little lady came in arrayed in her gay white robes, and leaning upon the arm of the Unbeliever. Then, the guests took their seats, and there was eating and drinking, and speechifying and congratulating.

But we will pass over the festivities of the evening, and return to our friends on the following day, when Nature herself bid them welcome in a morning of summer sunshine; and while the dew yet sparkled on the grass, and the air was perfumed with the breath of white hawthorn, they went out to luxuriate in the pleasure grounds, and talk over their party.

"But which was Mr. Smith?" asked Wallace, turning to Mrs. Fleetwood.

"The old gentleman,"—Mrs. Fleetwood began, but Agnes interrupted her, "Oh no, not that Mr. Smith, we are meaning the Rector."

"My dear, you know very well that Mr. Smith is not a dining man," returned Mrs. Fleetwood—"our Rector never goes out, Mr. Arnold,—at least not"—

"To large dinner parties or balls, you know, Wallace," Agnes again interrupted, "but he will come and see us when we are alone, so let us go and invite him and Fanny."

"Remember it is Mrs. Smith's place to call upon you, and not yours to call upon Mrs. Smith, Agnes," said Mrs. Fleetwood, gravely.

Agnes laughed, and said she feared she never should succeed in squaring her feelings with Louisa's notions of *etiquette*.

"And this morning we will go to the farm," said Richard Fleetwood, "the new white farm," he added with an air of complacency; and assuredly, never since the new white farm was thatched and whitewashed did the country thereabouts look more attractive in its green apparel than it did this morning.

"Yes, we will go to the farm," echoed Mrs. Fleetwood.

"And Agnes," her brother began, but Agnes had disappeared as if by magic, and in another moment she was recognised running with childish impatience towards the garden gate,—her long hair streaming in the breeze.

Mrs. Fleetwood looked at Wallace for an explanation; —he protested that he was not in the secret.

"She knows her own way at all events," said Richard, looking after his sister, and then again turning towards the new white farm.

"It appears 'plain as way to parish church,'" said the Unbeliever, laughing.

"Ah, you know all about it," said Richard, "well, we will walk to the farm if you please, and then, I suppose we must follow her."

Meanwhile Agnes was in front of the said parish church, and crossing the quiet church yard—and there, were the mis-shapen or erect gravestones, irregularly interspersed among the living green grass, while white daisies and bright yellow meadow flowers opened their little petals to the warm sun, and bloomed in their May beauty, over the charnel houses of the dead. Agnes paused a moment, but it was only to admire the gorgeous coloring of a blue butterfly, as it fluttered by, alighted

on her bonnet string, and again, stretched its wings and floated away in the sunshine. "To-morrow we die," was engraven upon every thing around her, but she read it not. Again, she hurried forward, and her heart drunk in happiness with epicurean eagerness. And now she was standing before the door of the Rectory, it was ajar, and she could hear some one, in the monotonous tones of childhood, reading an early lesson book.

Meanwhile Mrs. Smith, who was engaged in the kitchen, amid an array of little frocks and stockings,—for it happened that this was the washing day,—heard Agnes's footstep, and exclaimed, in a tone of voice that was meant to sound highly incredulous, " Leonard that's not you !"

It was no such thing. Leonard was quietly occupied with the children according to his wife's arrangement, and was at that moment, standing over his study table, with one hand placed, caressingly, upon the head of a little Smith, and the other feeling over a huge Map of Europe, for a town in the South of France. Hearing Mrs. Smith's voice, however, he stept to the room door.

"Mr. Smith !" exclaimed Agnes.

" My dear Agnes, is it really you?" said the Rector; "Fanny, come up stairs, here is Mrs. Arnold;" and in a few more seconds, Agnes, Fanny, and the Rector, were seated on the old-fashioned sofa in the library; the ladies chattering with all the peculiar loquacity of the sex.

Presently, Wallace, with his brother and sister joined them; Agnes introduced the Smiths to her husband, and to do the Unbeliever justice, he endeavored to make

himself very agreeable, and appear pleased with his wife's friends. Half an hour passed as pleasantly as it did rapidly; Mrs. Fleetwood rose to withdraw, and Agnes reluctantly did the same.

"But the children, you must see the children, Agnes," said Mrs. Smith, "Leonard do call the boys,"

There was no need for the call, for, just at this moment, the room door opened, and three little Smiths pushed eagerly forward, laughing at the preposterous appearance of the fourth, who was staring at them through the eyes of a gigantic mask, which so fairly covered him as to leave nothing visible but a diminutive pair of red stockings and boots.

Notwithstanding the rough mould of his character, Wallace Arnold loved little children. He extended his hand as the merry group approached, and one of them stopped to examine his watch and rings. "Ah, you don't know me said the Unbeliever."

"Don't I though? but *I* do;" returned the boy, smiling archly, and looking him full in the face, "You are an infidel!"

This reply was uttered in an interval of dead silence, and, of course, everybody heard it. Mrs. Smith's complexion suddenly heightened. She dreaded the boy's next sentence, which she naturally conjectured would be, "Mamma says so," and turned anxiously to the Rector, and the Rector looked out of the window.

"Oh, Arthur, what do you know about infidels?"—exclaimed Agnes, laughing heartily, "No, he is not an infidel."

"Run away, Arthur," said Mrs. Smith, peremptorily.

This was a signal for the whole party. The Rector and Arthur accompanied their friends to the gate, and Wallace shook hands with his new acquaintance as warmly as if he had known him for years.

"Oh Leonard did you notice how grave he looked?" said Mrs. Smith, when her husband joined her in the library; "I'm afraid we have offended him, and—and—the boy knew no better."

"Offended him! nonsense!" said Smith, and having thus, at once, allayed his wife's uneasiness, he added, "poor Arnold,—yes he *did* look grave, Fanny; I could fancy that at that moment his mind turned to the period of his own infancy, when, perhaps, he would have shrunk back with distrust and aversion from the stern look of a stranger, like himself. We know not how the kindlier and gentler feelings of his nature have been kept back, and stunted in their growth, if not fairly uprooted, by unjust and unhappy treatment. Perhaps he was a precocious child in the nursery, his mind expanding, like a tender flower on a premature spring day; but the spirit of this cold world, like the frost at night, has blighted it, and his heart, closed to love from earth, was ill prepared to believe the love of Heaven. Let us hope that his marriage with Agnes may awaken sympathies within him, which have laid dormant from childhood; and then, who can say, but, when softened by the power of human affection, his mind may be fitted for the reception of that influence, which is described in Scripture as Divine mercy, and everlasting love."

* * * * * *

"What do you think of the Smiths, Wallace?" enquired Agnes, as she and her husband walked home beneath the shade of the thick elms and beeches, which shelter the dry, dusty lane, leading from the Hall to the Rectory."

"The Smiths are not people to think about," replied Wallace, with an expression of indifference. "However they seem very amiable, and very happy, in their own way—plain, simple people."

"I don't think that Fanny is a woman of more than ordinary mind," said Agnes, "but she is so kind and affectionate I cannot help liking her; but Mr. Smith, Wallace—Mr. Smith is a first-rate scholar!"

"So is every man that minds his books," replied the Unbeliever, tartly, "Mr. Smith is one of those who have been taught much and have learnt little. A Biblical critic, perhaps, he is,—wise in many books, but yet as ignorant of the true principles of knowledge as his own child, and"—

"What *do* you mean?"—interrupted Agnes.

Arnold laughed. "I mean that he is a clergyman," he answered, "and I never meet a clergyman in company, but I am reminded of ladies' shoes in China; or of a certain process for flattening the head, practised by a still more barbarous nation. It is just the main design of college discipline, to cramp aud confine men's thoughts within the narrow range of those of their fathers and forefathers. It is thus, that instead of the nurseries of genius, our schools of learning are become the hot-beds

of superstition and bigotry: and such is the perversion of literature,"—

"I don't think," said Agnes timidly, for she had a great respect for Arnold's understanding, "I don't think it is possible for any system of education to act as an effectual drag upon the human intellect. Thought is as essential to mind, as breath to animal life. I believe, that, if you knew them better, you would admit that there are college-bred men, and men of Christian principle too, whose minds are as unfettered by college discipline as your own."

"Not so, my love," returned the Unbeliever, "Christianity, is itself, a system which confines man's energies of thought: where there is true moral and intellectual greatness, there is no Christianity."

"I have never heard before," said Agnes, her eye lighting up with an expression of good-humoured raillery, "that true moral and intellectual greatness consisted in disregarding the laws of God; if so, you may find enough of it among the profane laborers"—in the coal-pit, she would have said, but the look with which the remark was received, stopped her, and she quickly added, "Christianity is a service of love; free, yet more binding than the chain of the oppressor, like the holy bond of affection which unites me to you Wallace."

"But," replied her husband, "who can believe thus charitably of the stipendiary services of our theological professors?

"Well, hear the language of a Christian theologian of another day,—'Who art thou that judgest another

man's servant, to his own master he standeth or falleth.' Now, who is the uncandid, the unprejudiced?"

"Mr. Smith," said Wallace, laughing, "with his Bible and Prayer-book, and his soul bowed down to a tithe of their meaning, abstracted in his thirty-nine Articles of religion; and, there he is," he added, as he pointed back to the Rectory, "in his own little Zion, cramming his fine lads with mythology and theology, and teaching them to pray once a year, for Jews, Turks, *Infidels*, and Heretics."

"Do be grave, Wallace," said Agnes, notwithstanding she was laughing with him "the subject"—

"Demands it," interrupted the Unbeliever. "Christianity is not a matter of which we are at liberty to dispose without enquiry. If true, our highest interests are involved in it."

"And if false," rejoined Agnes, "we lose nothing by yielding to its requirements. Don't you remember what poor Byron says; 'Indisputably, the firm believers in the gospel have a great advantage over all others, for this simple reason—that if true, they will have their reward hereafter, and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the existence of an exalted hope through life, without subsequent disappointment; since, at the worst for them, out of nothing, nothing can arise—not even sorrow.'"

Wallace shook his head. "We do not wish to believe a lie," he answered, "even to secure to ourselves a temporary advantage."

"But you do not know that our religion is a lie," exclaimed Agnes, "and you will not bring your mind under its influence by a due attention to its claims."

"No, Heaven help me! I wont," said Wallace, "if you mean, as I presume you do, begin a system of reading the Bible, and church-going, and praying, any more than I will put myself into leading-strings when I am able to walk alone. I will not fetter *my* understanding with nursery fables and Jewish genealogies, when the book of *truth* and of *Nature* is unsealed to me!"

"And, what have you learnt from your unsealed book that had not been already taught you in your 'nursery fables?' What moral truth has Nature unfolded that had not long since been recognised as one of the principles of Jesus of Nazareth? The book of nature is full of mysteries which are inexplicable, except as explained by Divine revelation;" and Agnes added, before the Unbeliever had time to reply, "what, indeed has either of us learnt, although with both the Bible in our hands, and the book of nature open before us, that we can speak of having thrown aside our leading-strings, and ventured alone into the vast ocean of truth? One of the greatest men of our country chose rather to represent himself as one, who was only gathering shells along its shore,—and Wallace, *he* was a believer in Christianity."

"Was he?" said the Unbeliever, with a look of incredulity. "I dare say *you* think so. Poor Mr. Smith," he added, after a pause, "if the boy had said you are a poacher, or a pickpocket, or a smuggler, he could not

have looked more disconcerted."

"And you—you were so grave, Wallace."

"And it were enough to make a man thoughtful, Agnes,—that dark room, with its antiquated furniture, and the old church seeming to be looking in at the window, as if it had something particular to say to us—I was thinking of my own childhood; and how the heart, in after life, is tuned to the song they sing to us in infancy."

CHAPTER V.

"At length the world of sorrow through which we have passed lies like a beautiful island behind us, every spot of which we greet with looks of love."

DAYS, weeks passed, and the Unbeliever and his beloved lived in the Elysuim of undisturbed affection; hoping, thinking, breathing as for each other; and life flitted away like a sunshiny holiday.

One evening, they wandered together through the dark woods and plantations adjoining the Hall, dreaming their time in looks and words of love. In returning home, they passed the parish church. Agnes was fatigued with her long walk, and she rested herself upon the style—a few rude wooden steps which constitute one of the entrances into the church-yard. It was a fine summer's evening, and as she gazed upon the beautiful landscape, intersected with the zigzag mazes of the still blue river, which lay stretched in the sunshine before her, images of peace and beauty fell reflected from her eye upon her heart; and she laid her hand upon her husband's arm and said, "What a Paradise the world seems this evening!"

Wallace did not reply, and as if sobered by a sudden glance at the monuments of death at her feet, his wife quickly added, "Let us go into the church-yard and moralise among the tombstones,—the graves of those,

who once lived in this world of seeming reality; and loved and hoped as we do."

"To-night? dear Agnes; no, not to-night," said the Unbeliever. "I have no sympathy with death this evening. My heart rejoices in its own immortality!"

Agnes smiled; but she succeeded in leading him reluctantly into the church-yard; and the two stood leaning against the old porch, and gazing at the disfigured gurgoils which look through the ivy that clings to the walls of the building. In a few seconds the dull sound of the church bell fell, and vibrated in the air.

"And now, there's the passing bell!" exclaimed Wallace, throwing a hasty glance at the further side of the church-yard—"and Mr. Smith, and—of course, a funeral! Did I not tell you that I had no sympathy with death, this evening?" and half in jest, half in earnest, he sprang across the style, and quickly disappeared in the adjoining wood.

Agnes turned, and looked after him for a moment; but she had come into the church-yard to moralise, as she expressed it, and the sight of a village funeral, with its imposing simplicity, and train of rural mourners, together with the quiet of the passing bell, would but have added to the interest of the scene. After a little hesitation, instead of following her husband, she turned to the side of the church-yard, where he had just recognised Mr. Smith, and passed noiselessly towards him, through the high grass.

Perhaps the Rector of Clifton did not particularly relish this interruption to his reflections. He was, how-

ever, far too amiable to appear annoyed by it, though, he certainly started, when he heard Agnes pronounce his name.

"Are you reading?" she said, instantly shrinking back with her instinctive delicacy of feeling, "Don't let me disturb you, Mr. Smith, I thought that you were waiting for the funeral."

"The funeral?" repeated Smith, raising his hand to his forehead, like some one who is conscious that he has forgotten something; "Oh no, *that* was not the passing bell, Mrs. Arnold."

"No!" said Agnes, laughing;—

"No," said Smith, looking remarkably grave.

Agnes checked herself and there was a long pause. "I am afraid," she said, at length, "that you will have thought my levity highly incongruous at such a time, and in such a place, but"—

"Not incongruous, exactly, if there is cause for it," interrupted the Rector, "but certainly, somewhat uncalled for."

Agnes made out, or rather, she tried to make out the connexion between cause and effect, by relating how she had wished to moralise among the tombstones, and brought Wallace to the church-yard against his will; and how, he had made a precipitate retreat to the woods again at the sound of what he thought was the passing bell. "The fact is," she said, "I came into the church-yard, not from any sympathy with sorrow or the grave, as perhaps, you may have done, but because I felt too happy, and I wished to moderate my own flow of enjoy-

ment by reflecting upon the shortness and vanity of our life; and now—you must think that I am exceedingly flippant."

"No, no, never mind," said Smith, smiling, either at Agnes or at his own thoughts, "I am very glad to hear," he added, after a moment's reflection, "that you are so happy. In your case, 'to obey is to enjoy.' Be thankful for this spring in the heart, in early life; this beautiful sunshine, before the cloudy days come, and the clouds return again after the rain."

"Don't quote Solomon, Mr. Smith," said Agnes, "he appears to me to have viewed all things through an unhappy medium. I do not like to hear of vanity and vexation of spirit, unless you mean to explain it, that vexation of spirit is vanity."

"But," said Smith, "there is an Autumn in life, when the long, cold evenings advance upon us, and those bright, green leaves, dead and withered, fall rustling to the ground, and the little birds gather themselves to their native forests"—

"When," said Agnes, "the woods are arrayed in their motley colors, or, like a resurrection of rude skeletons, the tall tree stands up with the tender shoot of this year's raising, all in nature's rough outline, and they shake their naked arms to the blast. Nature is beautiful both in winter and spring."

"It is beautiful," said Smith, thoughtfully, "and so is the mind of the Christian, struggling with the storms of life, borne along with the resistless tide of adversity, entering the cloud, and although fearing, trusting.

The evil day will come to us all, and it is hard to do right and suffer for it."

"Yes, very hard," said Agnes, looking up and smiling, "but is such a case possible? You remember the language of David, 'Light and gladness' is sown for the upright. Has not even the martyr to truth and conscience an inward satisfaction in his sufferings, a holy consciousness of his own integrity, which more than compensates for the wrongs done him. You know we have heard of martyrs exulting with rapture in the midst of the most excruciating torture."

"We have," returned the Rector, "but it is not by looking at the martyrs in their last conflict, that we obtain a correct estimate of the extent of their sufferings. Many, who endured the fire and the sword, had doubtless already passed the bitterness of death, in the severity of some mental struggle, born only in secret, and with which a stranger could not intermeddle: an inward shrinking of spirit—perplexities regarding the world's moral government—sickness at heart of hope long deferred—have been endured by many, I imagine, during their long term of galling suspense and captivity, who, at the last, gladly and triumphantly, sealed their principles with their blood. Those were the days when they called upon God out of their low dungeon, but instead of drawing near at the voice of their breathing, He hid himself in thick darkness, and shut out for a while their prayer; when it seemed as if He who had weakened their strength in their journey, and shortened their way, had blasted their cherished schemes of usefulness and caused their

hope to perish from the earth; when they felt as if they were forsaken both of God and man."

"Why suppose such a case," said Agnes, "Is not grace given to us according to our need?"

"According to our need, but not always, or frequently according to our wishes. For reasons, which we are, as yet, unable to understand, God's dealings with man are obscure and perplexing, and often, in the hour of nature's weakness, he leaves us with no other staff to lean upon but his own promises, that we may learn to stand by faith."

"But, our Divine Father deals with his people as children and friends, and assuredly, he will proportion his blessings to our wants," persisted Agnes.

"To our real wants, undoubtedly, he will," replied the Rector; "but we are not always rightly sensible of our wants. We may set our whole hearts, with childish ardour and impatience, upon some thing that is not good for us. We may be unable to obtain it, or having obtained it, God may at once remove it, and leave us for a while in our own darkness."

"Still He designs that we should be happy," said Agnes.

"Ultimately," said Smith.

"Now," said Agnes, "on this beautiful Summer's evening, and to-morrow, and always."

"If our happiness do not interfere with our moral strength of character, and our happiness hereafter. Perhaps too much happiness in this life would make us enervated and selfish."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Agnes, raising her eyes from the grassy sod in the church-yard to the clear blue sky, "God is love, and happiness is the proper element of his creatures, Man, foolish, erring man has polluted this earth, when *He* created it, it was a Paradise; and even yet, are there not traces of its holy origin in the works of nature?—in the bright verdure of the woods? —the summer flowers and the fair tranquil light of the setting sun behind our Clifton hills? Look, Mr. Smith, how old age is thickening upon this beautiful day —the shadows of evening are closing around us and the sun fast sinking to his rest—he goes not down amid the rough tempest or the whirlwind, but in quiet peace; and so it will be with us. When sorrow, sickness, or old age approaches, it shall not meet us with the violence of a hurricane, to drive and crush the feeble spirit to the grave, but throw its shadow from the distance, gradually preparing us for its approach; and calmed and tranquilised, we shall be made to feel that every dark dispensation of Providence is indeed a messenger of Heaven, a ministering angel of love. Mr. Smith, what are you thinking about now?" she added, looking enquiringly into the Rector's grave blue eyes, when he had made no answer.

"I will tell you," he replied, smiling. "I am thinking that the heart so full of the 'young dream' of hope,"—

"Full, almost to bursting," interrupted Agnes, gaily.

"Those who can enjoy, can suffer, and suffer deeply," said Smith.

"Heaven will lay no more upon us than we are able

to bear," said Agnes.

"If as much as we can bear," said Smith.

"Oh, Mr. Smith," exclaimed Agnes, her eyes again lighting up with an expression of delight, "I am so happy this evening that you cannot throw a single shadow across my prospect, although you prophesy evil until midnight."

"Heaven forbid that I should try to do so," said Smith. "May your heart be prepared for the approach of sorrow, and when the enemy strikes may it not be to conquer."

"But why do you talk of the uncertainty of every thing?"

"What is certain but the love of God?"

"Bless *you* for saying *that*," cried Agnes; "then happiness is certain, and you and I shall pass through the storms of life feeling that they are full of blessing, and looking forward to eternal sunshine in Heaven. We shall feel that pain and sorrow and death are but flitting momentary shadows—shadows of glory that is yet in the distance"—

"If," said Smith, interrupting her, "it were the divine decree that all this beautiful prospect before you should, with one stroke, become withered and desolate."

"How can it?" said Agnes, God's designs respecting man are those of peace and not of evil, and He cannot dash from my lips the cup of looked for enjoyment, and turn my earth into winter, because *His* nature is *love*. Nay, so far from shrinking from the divine purposes concerning me, if I judge rightly of my own state of

feeling, this evening, in that very decree, I find my Heaven. God is great and powerful, but His essential nature is benevolence—is love. He clothed this landscape with beauty—He makes His sun to shine upon us all--He gives food to the most unthinking objects of His creation, and not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by Him—He stands towards us in a relation so near and intimate that we are permitted to call him 'our father;' and He hath given us life and breath and all things,—all things to enjoy. And, will He repent that he hath created us, or shall I distrust His designs and fill my soul with unworthy thoughts of His goodness, despite His protestations of overflowing kindness, both in revelation and in nature. No, Mr. Smith, I may doubt the affection and faithfulness of an earthly friend, although," she added, in a lower tone, "Heaven forbid that I should; but, come what may, I will venture, like good David, to fall into the hands of God, for I know that His mercies are great. Live or die, I dare trust myself, life, happiness, every thing to the unchangeable faithfulness of the Creator. Let sorrow come with its resistless tide, there is a point where its heavy waves must be staid. It shall not crush—it shall not overwhelm me. Even should the angel of death approach—pale sickness wither my strength, and you should follow me to the grave, now, in the morning of life, what then? It is sweet to die in the arms of those we love best, and in sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Earth and life are beautiful, but they are but faint images of Heaven and immortality. What do we in

this world know of the things which shall be hereafter—the glory that shall be revealed?—Besides, should I die, thus early, there is one to whom my death might be the resurrection of life. Were *his* heart divided by death, perhaps, the doctrine of our immortality would be presented to his mind, with a power which he could no longer resist; and those truths with which his reason has grappled and rejected, his heart would be made to feel, at once, like one of its own instincts. Even, while I have been conversing with you, the prospect of life has become brighter, and another, and again another shadow has melted off. Oh, I am, and I shall be happy. Do you understand me, when I say that I feel as if my own will were imperative—and as if my will were the response of my destiny?"

"No," said Smith, with emphasis, "The prospect before you is as yet shrouded in the darkness of futurity; and, 'Who is he that saith and it cometh to pass when the Lord commandeth it not.' 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow.' It is true that God's designs concerning man are characterized by peace and good-will, and that, so long as we continue under the influence of His love, all things shall contribute to our good; but *we*,—how do we know of the ways by which His designs are to be effected? How often is love's young dream followed by disappointment—life's early blossoms of hope shaken to the ground by the first breeze—sorrow succeeding sorrow, and disappointment disappointment, until he, who began life, so full of promise,—as if sailing in the calm blue ocean, in the sunshine of hope and happiness

is found at last, clinging only to a shattered wreck. The evil days will come"—

"Oh, Mr. Smith," interrupted Agnes, "I will not stay to hear you talk in this way any more. Do you not believe," she added more gravely, "that 'God is love,' and is not that enough to make his creatures happy?

"Stay one minute," said Smith, detaining her by the hand, "I do believe it—I believe it with my whole heart."

"And I believe it," said Agnes, stepping a few paces towards the wood.

"Because thou hast seen thou hast believed," said the Rector. "The truth to which you have so often referred, this evening, is to you a self-evident proposition. You see it written upon every thing around you, and you have the evidence of its truth in the happiness within you. But the time may come, when this beautiful picture shall fade from your imagination, and your heart sink into midnight darkness. The time may come, when some fiery trial—some startling, maddening visitation from Heaven shall so wound and irritate the feeble spirit that you will be ready to kneel in thankfulness for the forgetfulness of sleep, afraid lest, reason,—herself appalled by the sight of her own sufferings,—should shrink from her seat. *Then*, may you hang your hope upon the eternal love of God and take your refuge in those declarations of His character which you are now looking upon and admiring only as the light shades of a summer's landscape. *Then*, may you turn to the love of God, as your hiding-place—your shadow from the heat, 'when the blast of the terrible one is as a storm

against the wall.' Learn to look upon life in its *reality*. This world is no longer a garden of Eden, but a wilderness, haply, to some, a vale of tears; but it is full of interest to us, as connected with another world. We have heard it said,—perhaps you have been reminded of it while standing among these monuments of mortality, where the infant of days sleeps with the man of many generations, that it is an awful thing to *die*; but remember, that it is a still more awful thing to *live*. It is life, not death, which is pregnant with the interests of eternity. Every thing which we say or do now, is linked with our future destiny. It is our life here, which gives a character to our life hereafter. 'Arise, and be doing, for this is not your rest.' You, my dear Agnes, are now upon enchanted ground. Beware, lest you fall asleep there; or while you are loitering on your way to gather the wild flowers of the wilderness, some angry storm, powerful, and deadly in its influence, as the scorching simoon lay you at once in the dust."

"Well, then, I am spell-bound," said Agnes, carelessly, and looking back and kissing her hand to Smith, she ran into the adjoining wood.

The Rector returned by a private gate into his own garden, where, whatever might have been his reflections, they were brought to an abrupt termination by the four little Smiths. They had met "Papa," as they said, only to say, 'good night;' but now, they were vociferous in their enquiries as to whether there ought not to be a short interval between supper-time and bed-time, and with their lips besmeared with gingerbread, appealed to

him, as an authority on the question. Ever kind and indulgent, the Rector was about to have consented to their wishes; but, before he had so far committed himself, Mrs. Smith joined them, announcing that it was nearly nine o'clock, and that Nurse was waiting; whereupon, "good night," "good night," was uttered by the four little ones, in a breath, to which Fanny replied with various expressions of endearment, and Smith by repeating the familiar adage, 'Early to bed and early to rise,' &c., &c.

As soon as the boys were fairly out of hearing, the Rector led his wife into the lane, before the house; and in the stillness of the evening, which even the little birds seemed afraid of breaking—so holy was the repose of nature—he told her of his long tête à tête with Agnes; and from discussing the character of their fair friend, Mrs. Arnold, they talked of the vicissitudes of their own past life. But, although the hallucinations of romantic expectation had long since moved off from their prospect, and they now saw life in its real character, no tone of bitterness or of disappointment mingled with their feelings. They had had trials,—and what were they more than others, that their cup should not be a mixed one—they had had trials, but notwithstanding all, they had been happy. Their path had been marked with peace, for they had been taught that real happiness does not arise from the gifts of God around us, but within us,—the Advent and reign of peace within our own hearts.

"Had we made this world our resting place," said the Rector, "and looked for lasting enjoyment in the beauty of an earthly paradise, our hearts had closed with every

flitting cloud, like the flowers beneath our feet, and 'the sun had scorched us by day or the moon by night.' But, we have remembered that God and not earth is our home, and learnt, under trials that might have laid our souls even in the dust, to count no disappointment a disaster, that did not hinder us in our way to our father's house."

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What on earth can satisfy the restless cravings of the human heart, or repay its devotion? The thoughtful mind turns from the acquisition of wealth as sordid drudgery, and from pleasure, as degrading dissipation; and perhaps, for a little while, seeks satisfaction in the vastness of her own speculations—it may be in the busy field of scientific investigation—gazing high into heaven, or deep into the earth, if haply "she will reveal the secrets of her coming forth.' But, even in these pursuits her rest is only in the weariness of perpetual motion; and sometimes, exhausted by her own efforts, she sinks, at once, a paralytic driveller, stricken with the lightning she has herself drawn down upon her head. Or, if she take a low range, and make her resting place in the ark of human affection, is she satisfied?—Love is strong as death, but the destroyer goes forth conquering and to conquer; and no power of affection can turn aside his fatal shaft, or arrest him in his path.

Seek for happiness where we may on earth, we shall meet with ultimate disappointment. It is God alone that can satisfy the desires of the soul that is formed for God; and, as in the world's infancy, He would have no

similitude or idol image in the temple of His presence, so now He maintains His sovereignty in the temple of the human heart, and asserts His own supremacy and His right to our entire devotion, by teaching us that every other object is unworthy of it.

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Meanwhile, the merry Agnes returned to her Unbeliever, who was waiting for her in the long avenue. He enquired after the 'simple Rector,' and she told him that his 'amiable, happy Mr. Smith' was a misanthrope, and that his melancholy temperament was so 'catching' that she would not venture within sight of the Rectory, or the church, or even the sombre yew, in the churchyard, for—a definite length of time,—we are not quite sure, but the term sounded very much like, for centuries.

"He is so superstitious, so miserably superstitious," said the Unbeliever, clasping his wife's hand as he spoke.

Agnes was not yet sufficiently initiated into the peculiarities of her husband's phraseology distinctly to understand him, and she looked enquiringly into his eyes, but as they told only their own old tale, she went on to rehearse her conversation with Mr. Smith until they returned to the Hall.

CHAPTER VI.

"The Forest and the everlasting hills,
Smiled in that joyous sunshine, they partook
The universal blessing."

AND yet, the very next morning, when Wallace was busily occupied with his desk and papers, Agnes burst abruptly into the room, exclaiming,

"I am going to the Rectory!"—

"O woman—woman—'thy vows are traced in sand,'" said the Unbeliever, laughingly.

"Now, don't laugh at me, Wallace," cried Agnes, "but leave your desk and come with me. The obscurity of the future frightened me last night in the twilight, but we can dare to look at *life*, in the sunshine of the morning. See how the light is pouring through the blinds as if it wanted to gladden every heart—'truly it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun!'"

"Not, if 'all that cometh is vanity,'" said Wallace, quickly.

"Now, do you leave the future in its own twilight—I tell you the light is sweet," rejoined Agnes.

"And he that contradicteth, blasphemeth—but Agnes, I cannot attend to you, now—Dinner at five, remember," and looking up from the letter he had been writing, Wallace assumed Mrs. Fleetwood's tone and manner.

Agnes withdrew, singing an Irish air that happened to be one of his favorites. Wallace looked after her, as she slowly closed the room door, and again fixed his eyes upon his letter.

"My adored Agnes!" was the next sentence that he wrote, "Heaven forgive me for not mentioning her name sooner!—is a graceful, little fairy; and if you could only see her, as I did this moment, with her girlish white frock and sash and flowing flaxen ringlets—no matter. In heart, she is a true woman,—tender and loving, but uncertain and capricious—'Thy name is frailty,' and perhaps, the natural character of the sex, has in her case, been strengthened by the excessive indulgence of my late friend, Dr. Fleetwood, and the attention and constancy of her early *aspirants*, myself not excepted. In a word, Agnes is one of Nature's darlings, and the good old lady has well nigh spoilt her with her fondness and caresses. In mind, she is, or will be, what the man who has the good fortune to be her husband pleases. As yet, she has her head full of theology, having taken lessons from a clergyman in this neighbourhood, whose amiable stupidity has, somehow, won upon her. I consider her as my own property, however—mine, to mould and fashion according to my peculiar ideal of feminine excellence; and after I have gained her confidence by a most discreet and reverent attention to all that she has to say about faiths and creeds, &c., I shall gradually initiate her into the mysteries of truth—I shall teach her to think for herself, leading her, as it were blindfold, to heights, from which

her fancied heaven of immortality shall melt away beneath her feet—like the tumbling panorama of light clouds, through which you and I passed, you will remember, on our ascents on the mountains, last summer!

Notwithstanding that such is my purpose, I am in no hurry to effect it. I shall say or do nothing to shock my wife's religious feelings; for *entre nous*, religion does a woman no harm, so long as she can hold to it with child-like faith and sincerity; but Agnes has a mind for anything, and as my companion for life she must learn to *understand* me, and sympathise with me; she must in some measure keep pace with me, in thought and feeling, or the flow of happy intercourse between us will cool, and congeal, and at length, be finally frozen up.

Do you question her willingness to fall in with my designs? I answer, she *must*, and necessity has no law. Once establish your sovereignty in the heart of a woman, and your rule is absolute and irresistible. Though she may have a 'man's mind,' she can have but a 'woman's might.' She is led by the affections. It is the decree of nature that she should endure a voluntary captivity."

Wallace had proceeded thus far with his epistle when the door was again opened, and Agnes, in her shawl and bonnet came smiling into the room. "What are you writing?—Oh, a letter," she answered for herself, "let me see it?"—

"Let you see it," exclaimed the Unbeliever, with assumed dignity of manner. "Well," he added "for this once,"—and he threw the letter hastily on one side, and as quickly produced another from his desk.

"No! that's not it," said the quicksighted Agnes, springing forward, and diving with her little hand amongst his papers until it rested upon the identical epistle, with the contents of which we are acquainted.

"Stop, Stop!" exclaimed the Unbeliever, earnestly.

Agnes started and withdrew her hand. "You do not wish me to read your letters? Is that what I am to understand?" she said enquiringly.

"No, certainly not," said the Unbeliever, carelessly.

"I am to read them?"

"No, you are not to read them."

"Then, I tell you that you *are* to read my letters," she replied, her face lighted up with an expression of indignant surprise, "Look at me, and read the deepest thoughts of my heart—I would not care if you could read my whole soul."

And Wallace did raise his unbelieving eyes to her in the same moment; and although he did not altogether trust her, he loved her the better for this expression of *her* trust in *him*. "Pardon,—pardon!" he exclaimed, leaning over her, and brushing her soft, glossy curls across her eyes.

"But let me read the letter you were writing," persisted Agnes.

Wallace hesitated a moment and smiled. "My dear Agnes," he said, "You shall read my letters since you wish it. I shall not read yours, however," he added, with marked emphasis. "As to the document with which I was engaged, when you entered the room, it

was not a letter, but a paper containing some evidence respecting"—

"Oh, who cares!" interrupted his wife.

She trusted him, and for this once she was the Unbeliever's dupe.

* * * * *

In the course of the morning Wallace led her into the plantation, and in happy forgetfulness of all beside themselves, they talked of the years of their early intimacy. They afterwards crossed the river in a little ferry boat, and wandered to the "New White Farm." It was to them a wonderfully interesting excursion. The sun shone brightly, and the birds sang, and the lambs frisked, in the morning of their short day; and swarms of giddy flies swam in the mild air, filling it with their drowsy hum; and little children gathered cowslips, and climbed the hedges for pink hawthorn.

"Let us be happy, Agnes," said Wallace, "for this is one of Nature's own holidays." He drew his arm round her waist, and she leaned her head against his shoulder.

"Agnes," repeated the Unbeliever, as if it gave him pleasure to pronounce his wife's name, "this warm sunshine reaches deep into my heart; yet, I have a presentiment that it will not last."

"Silence! I see nothing before me but sunshine," replied the lady.

"My happiness is in your keeping, dear Agnes," said her husband; and observing that she looked pale with the exertion of a long walk, on a hot summer's morning,

he left her to order some refreshment from the farm.

Agnes was alone with nature. She threw herself upon the green grass, and for a moment, closed her eyes to the beauty of the landscape, and to the rich, blue canopy of heaven: but yet the merry sky-lark poured his light song in her ear, and the low gentle murmur of the ring-dove echoed from the adjoining wood.

"How natural it is," she said to herself, "for love, and hope, and joy to make to itself a melody!" and in accordance with the feelings of her heart, she drew a blank leaf from her pocket-book, and attempted to write verses.

Now, we cannot say much for Agnes' talent for poetry; but as the lines she wrote that morning were the song of her own joyous spirit, we will venture to transcribe them, irregular though they be, with few omissions or alterations.

"Hail Nature in thy spring of love!
Mirror of happiness above!
Full of beauty, warmth, and grace,
Heaven smiling in thy face:
Come, and from my darkness banish,
Thoughts, which in thy sunshine vanish;
For who could steel the heart in sadness,
While thou art wooing all to gladness!
Let me, in thy living breath,
Breathe rapture in a world of death.
For there's joy in the smiles of morning light,
In the countless glories of dark midnight,
The stillness of the calm blue heaven,
Or the dim shadowy clouds of even;

In every tree with blossoms laughing,
And every insect pleasure quaffing,
And the little birds that sing for gladness,
As if the earth had ne'er known sadness!
And in every beautiful fluttering thing,
Moving around me, with joyous wing—
Like flowers, gorgeous and rare,
Dancing in the balmy air,
From their chrysalis captivity,
Full of life and joy and liberty;
Awoke to live and breathe and move,
In the sunshine and the spring of love—
In the smile that blesses the infant's sleep,
And the love that makes its mother weep
As she watches by its cradle bed,
Or leans upon her breast its head;
In the rapture of the lover's eye,
In the ardour of the lover's sigh,
In the childish dreams and sweet content
Of the little laughing innocent:
In mutual trust, by friendship lighted,
And never by bleak envy blighted;
The holy, quiet, calm repose,
Which but the kindred spirit knows;
The inexplicable sympathies,
The faith and hope and sacred ties,
The hallowed hopes and earnests given,
Lasting and beautiful as Heaven.
Or in conviviality,
Happy intercourse and free,
In the word of kindness spoken,
The interchange of love unbroken;
And in the looked for happy meeting,
Of absent friends, and friendship's greeting;
And the kiss that little children give,

With lips that never can deceive.

* * * * * *

Oh, what is man's high embassy!
Oh, what can be his destiny!
That 'mid this mass of woes beneath,
This world of miseries and death,
Such beautiful, bright glimpses yet are given,
Types of his future home, pledges of Heaven!—
Like pleasure sparkling through sorrow's tears,
The promised rainbow in the storm appears,
And even through life's blackest, darkest night,
Look down upon us glorious stars of light;
And soon again the sun looks forth to bless,
And all the world doth teem with happiness.

* * * *

Earth's temple ruined and defaced,
Laid desolate,—a barren waste,
Doth still of Heaven's high purpose tell its story,
And hath its *Shechinah* and cloud of glory;
Though now a broken, marred and faded ruin,
It speaks of God's design, and man's undoing;
And Nature, in her winter and her spring,
Through all her works, is yet a holy thing.
The human intellect with ardour fired,
And gazing into heights and depths untired;
Man's heart with all its sympathies,
Its frailties and mysteries,
Its steady confidence and holy faith,
Its love which fears and yet which conquers death;
And the bright day dreams and the hopes of youth,
And childhood's guilelessness, and woman's truth;
The silent night, or morning's early ray,
Or the pale twilight of declining day;
The peaceful lake, in tranquil beauty sleeping,
And every rivulet with pleasure leaping;

The trees, with many colored foliage bright,
Or covered o'er with blossoms vestal white;
The waving corn-field, or the grass-grown sod,
Is still an Altar to the Eternal God!

Between at least, every half dozen lines that she wrote, Agnes sprang to her feet, and looked around her for the return of the Unbeliever; but she was, as we are already aware, of somewhat short stature, which personal peculiarity effectually prevented her from seeing over the bushy hawthorn hedge, which separated the field in which she was reclining, from that adjoining the farm. Mrs. Arnold was an enterprising little lady, and had just formed the resolution of obviating the difficulty occasioned by her deficiency of stature by climbing into the hedge, when her husband laid his hand upon her shoulder, presenting her with a glass of cream.

"Wallace!" said Agnes.

"Do you see where the sun is?" returned the Unbeliever.

Agnes shielded her eyes with her hand, and looked up, exclaiming "It must be nearly five already!"—and they walked quickly towards the Old Hall.

"Do you know," said Agnes, musingly, that I had quite forgotten that this was Saturday until Mrs. Smith reminded me this morning, and to-morrow is Sunday—and—you will go to church with me, won't you, dear?"

"As I did last Sunday."

"But in the evening, Wallace," persisted his wife, "promise me, Wallace."

But the Unbeliever did not think it convenient to make any verbal communication upon the subject. He

merely looked earnestly at his wife, as if she were something very pleasant to look upon; and then, forgetting Saturday, and Sunday, and the Clifton parish Church, we believe that they talked on and on, like two lovers, until they reached the Hall. We have not however, thought either this, or other conversations of a similar character, worth recording.

CHAPTER VII.

"It appeareth in nothing more, that athiesm is rather in the lip than in the heart of man, than by this, that athiests will ever be talking of that their opinion, as if they fainted in it within themselves, and would be glad to be strengthened by the opinion of others: nay more, you shall have athiests strive to get disciples, as it fareth with other sects."—LORD BACON.

IT was Sunday morning, and who has not felt the calming, hallowing influence of a Sabbath spent in the country!

The morning was fair and sunshiny, and the village bells were pouring their music in the still air; country rustics, arrayed in their best Sunday clothes, were coming down in social groups, from the hamlets in the distance; while implements of husbandry were laid aside, and the farmer's teem grazed quietly in their pasture, after their six days' labour,—man and beast resting together in one common holiday.

The Unbeliever kneeled by the side of his wife within the walls of the parish church of Clifton that morning.

Agnes was praying, but Wallace was moralising. He was in the old family pew appropriated to the descendants of his late friend, Dr. Fleetwood. Beside him was the marble tablet, testifying in its gorgeous gilt characters, to the talents and virtues of the deceased; while a little further removed, was the dull family vault, where the last remains of his unhappy father-in-law rested in their silence. But Wallace was not appalled that morning at the sight of the gloomy escutcheon; nor did

he shrink at the recollection of the old man's last hours. Death appeared to his mind as a thing vague and unreal as its image, in the death's head and cross-bones, which grinned upon him from above the tablet. He lived,—and he felt as if he should live always.

The morning prayers were ended. Mr. Smith ascended the pulpit, and talked about Heaven and the resurrection; and Wallace heard him; but only, as though he heard him not. The gospel of peace sounded in his ears dull and monotonous as an oft repeated tale, and he believed it not.

The service was concluded, and the party from the Hall returned home. The day passed away, in its sunshine. Evening came; and again, the village bells rang, and the villagers were seen pouring down the lanes, or across the meadows, to worship. Agnes reminded her husband of the request which she had made, during their ramble to the "new white farm;" for her heart was with "the multitude that kept holiday," and the Unbeliever smiled, and hesitated; but firm in his own purpose, resolutely hung back, until the green fields were once more hushed in Sabbath stillness, and the last chime of the church bells had died away. Agnes was disappointed; she had urged him in her most winning manner, and now, assuming her accustomed playfulness, she declared that she would go alone.

"Will you?" exclaimed Wallace, in a tone of voice indicative of strong incredulity, but yet in the most perfect good humour; "We shall see," and throwing his arms round her he held her fast in his embrace.

"But, *let* me go;" said Agnes, beseechingly, without however attempting to disengage herself, "*let* me go to night, Wallace."

"Agnes, you are my only guardian angel," said the Unbeliever, passionately, "and you must stay with me, that you may preside over my thoughts this evening, and that your holy smile may bless me. Agnes, could you exist in Heaven, if *I* were not there? To me, this world were a wilderness, and paradise itself nothing better than a gloomy tomb without *you*."

"Wallace," said Agnes, quickly. He had awakened a shade of sorrow in the bosom of the light hearted girl; she turned away her head, and her eyes filled with tears.

"What a spoilt child you are!" said Wallace, half laughing, and releasing her. "I see that I must not contradict you another time; only forgive me this once; and do not talk of leaving me again this evening, or you will throw me into a passion, and *that* would be very wicked, especially if it disturbed you. Come, now that those bells have ceased their crazy clanking I will walk with you, and we will worship God together, in the temple of his own creation—you will not, why? then I must even fetch your bonnet and shawl, and dress you myself, unaccustomed as I am to such things."

He left her, and soon returned with various pieces of wearing apparel, which with no regard either to fashion, or common usage, he wrapped round her.

"Why, Wallace, what a figure you have made me look!" she exclaimed, rising and viewing herself in the mirror, when her husband had completed her toilette.

The Unbeliever protested that she looked heavenly, and they walked into the plantation.

It was a beautiful summer's evening, the sun still shining brightly upon the quiet landscape, while hardly one stray cloud floated over the vault of heaven. Wallace and his wife were unusually thoughtful, and for some minutes the silence of nature was uninterrupted except by the pressure of their feet upon the smooth gravel walks.

Adjoining the plantation there is the gamekeeper's lodge, standing like a picturesque hermitage, and half embedded in its thick ivy. Wallace stopped a moment, for the gamekeeper had been an old servant of Dr. Fleetwood's, and had known the Unbeliever from his early youth; and Timothy, for that was his name, came smiling to the door of his green dwelling.

"Such a grand evening this, for a walk, Sir," he said, looking at Wallace.

"It is one of God's own Sabbaths, Timothy," replied the Unbeliever; and glancing archly at Agnes as they took leave of the old man, he added, "I have led you from a temple made with hands to the very pavilion of the Eternal. It seems this evening as if God from Heaven had proclaimed a Sabbath and the whole world were at rest before Him! May we too rest from our weary apprenticeship to sin and suffering—the many toils and troubles of our past life—for assuredly this holy quiet in nature is no other than the voice of God, from the shekinah of his presence, announcing a Sabbath of peace to our hearts."

Agnes made no answer. Perhaps she felt that there is no repose for man but in God, and was thinking of the beautiful language of the Hebrew psalmist, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, &c."

"Yes," continued the Unbeliever, "I worship Him, who is the life of things, in the temple which is lighted up with His glory. Holy nature! hail to thee in thy Sabbath beauty!—thou art a friend of whose face we are never weary, and whom we love even in thy most homely apparel, but this evening—thy glorious sunlight —thy deep blue mountains and thy little hills rejoicing in their fertility, have filled my soul with thoughts of heaven,"—

"But you do not believe?" interrupted Agnes. "You suffer your present feelings to die away in these mere 'yearnings after immortality,' and in this world of uncertainty—standing, so to speak, between the living and the dead—instead of seeking to know Him, who has the keys of death and of Hell, you content yourself with idle and unmeaning apostrophies to nature, as *if she* were a living being to be loved and caressed! and when life is ended"—

"I will give—as somebody else did—'my body to the grave and my soul to the Great Perhaps,'" said Wallace, laughing.

"Perhaps?" repeated Agnes.

"Yes, the Great Perhaps. You talk of certainty Agnes," added the Unbeliever, "but, believe me, there is nothing certain within the limit of our enquiries. 'We know but in part'—the Bible itself says so."

"The Bible," said Agnes, but she stopped, and quickly answered, "'There is a light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Follow the light of heaven in your own conscience, as the Shepherds at Bethlehem followed the star which moved before them till it stood over the birth-place of our Saviour. The Spirit is promised who shall guide us into all truth."

"Truth—and what is truth?—the Gospel according to the Reverend Leonard Smith!"

"That to which the sincere enquirer after truth finds his way."

"Well, the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,—a set of ignorant Jews, who lived in the world, if they lived at all, eighteen centuries ago pretty nearly, and like their master were persecuted and scoffed at in their lives, and afterwards worshipped as demigods."

"You don't mean to deny"—

"I deny nothing, dear Agnes, I only tell you that, whether the Christian scheme was concocted by Christ or by his disciples, it contains contradictions and absurdities, which every man of reason must at once reject. For myself, I revere, I honor the great prophet of Nazareth; and rather attribute the scheme which bears his name, to the superstitious and ill-regulated minds of his ambitious disciples, who may have thought proper to mix up their own Jewish legends with the moral precepts of their master, than to Him whom I believe to be the true 'God-man,' sent to be, as it were, the living voice of nature, and deliver his people from their sins. Aye, and assuredly, it was time that a deliverer should come

down amongst us, for the temple of the world had well-nigh become without priest, or altar, or sacrifice,—a house of merchandise—a den of thieves. Confucius, Moses, Ezra, and others were prophets; but their light had been quenched in the superstitions of the multitude. The voice of God and of nature had long been hushed in silence—all had become thick midnight darkness, when again the day dawned, and the Sun of righteousness arose, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He spoke to all. His system of morality was as much adapted to scribes and doctors, as to the idle rabble that followed his daily steps, and from among whom, it may be, that he was compelled to select the twelve apostles. Let us not therefore identify Christ with them. The disciple is not the master. Who does not know how easily the most beautiful piece of art may be marred, or defaced, if left to be finished by unskilful hands. We need but compare the religious system of the Great Prophet with the Monastecism of a later date—to say nothing of other isms—to perceive that what *his* hands hath planted had been mercilessly rooted up. The garden of Eden, or of nature, is transformed into a stately cathedral, or a gloomy monastery. Even over the ashes of the martyred deliverer, an unnatural and repulsive system of doctrine is proclaimed, in his name. Man's ingenuity is taxed to corrupt the simplicity of truth; and silly superstitions, or Jewish legends, alike repugnant to the human heart and to the mind, are interwoven with the beautiful precepts of Christ."

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"Stop," said Agnes, "you are talking of what you do not understand:" but the Unbeliever had not finished his declamation, and he went on to some length, and rather further than we feel inclined to follow him; and he spoke so earnestly and so positively, that Agnes at length relapsed into silence, and listened without interrupting him. And why should she wish to combat his opinions? He knew as much as she did; perhaps, he knew more than she did, for like many of her sex, she had chosen rather to dwell upon the beautiful frame-work of Christianity as a living whole, than to descend into the dissecting room to study its anatomy—she had probably never paid that attention to the historical evidences of revealed religion which he had done; and yet, those truths upon which her own mind had long reposed with the certainty of conviction, he had rejected in unbelief! Why should she enter into controversy with him?

Wallace interpreted her silence in his own way, and suddenly turning towards her, he exclaimed, with passionate earnestness, "Then we are one in sympathy! and your heart renounces"—

"Renounces what!" cried Agnes, "the men who for not teaching morality but 'preaching Jesus and the resurrection,' suffered ignominy and martyrdom—the men who were eye-witnesses of the Saviour's humiliation and glory, and whose miracles attested the authority of their mission. No! Renouncing them, I renounce Christ and his gospel—I renounce the Christian revelation and stand alone in this dreary world—in the world without God—an orphan—an outcast—drifting about

in the universe I know not whither. Oh, Wallace, Heaven forbid that I should ever sympathise with your present feelings with regard to Christianity!"

"Heaven has precious little to do with either of us," said the Unbeliever.

After a short pause Agnes went on, "I cannot understand how the Christian religion,—the religion of peace is so aversive to your taste. We cannot argue about our feelings, for the heart loves instinctively; but to me there appears nothing in the gospel narrative, from the birth of Christ in the stable at Bethlehem, to his resurrection made manifest to the company of mourners at Jerusalem, to revoke the annunciation of the angel, 'Behold I bring you good tidings,' &c. I have some vague recollection of my own first impressions of Christianity. Perhaps it might be on the eve of Easter Sunday, or of some festival day; and I lay in my crib, while my old nurse leant over me, and in her simple language, told me the beautiful narrative, which embodies the great mysteries of our religion, and relates how, 'as, by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead;' and to my infant years the tale of eighteen centuries was new, and welcome—I fell asleep, and dreamed of Paradise—and from that hour until I was able to think for myself, I had some indefinite idea of my dependence upon a Being of mercy and love, whose dwelling seemed to me as in the beams of the morning; and my childish troubles were always relieved with the thought that *he* cared for me."

Agnes again paused, and gazing for some minutes

upon the peaceful landscape, leaned her head against the Unbeliever, exclaiming, "Wallace, I am, somehow, unhappy this evening."

"Hush, my guardian angel! You shall believe all the absurdities of Mahomet's paradise, before any one shall make you unhappy," he answered, "What have I been saying? Tell me, and you shall hear that I'll retract every syllable; meanwhile, we must return to the house."

"I will think about it," said Agnes.

And she did think about it; and while the bright verdure of the surrounding country was fast fading into the shadows of evening, and a few stray gleams of crimson sunlight, that had lingered behind the western hills, as if unwilling to withdraw, died away, the sunshine passed from her heart, and a feeling of deep depression came over her, which she could not explain to herself. Her husband's invectives against the truth still sounded in her ears; and though her affection to him was as strong as ever, she appeared at once, to have become sensible of the fearful consequences that might follow her connection with an avowed athiest. Ah, there is more truth and meaning in the Apostle's language, "What communion hath he that believeth with an infidel?" than some of us were inclined to think, when we heard the Unbeliever talk of the religion of nature, on the day that we first met with him. The religion of nature, forsooth! and what is the religion of nature to the man whose heart is at war with itself, and with heaven?—to the man who has no moral relish for the

truth? His ingenuity may devise a system, aspiring as Babel, but he is yet involved in his own cloudy atmosphere, and like the men of the old world, he is as far from the pavillion of the Eternal, upon the top-stone of his pinnacle, as he was on earth. He may trace the divine workmanship in the things around him, and talk with some degree of certainty, of the existence of Him who once, "breathed into man the breath of life;" but with all his searching, he is still in utter ignorance of the moral perfections of that Being, "who is higher than heaven, and deeper than hell."

Agnes had long tried to persuade herself that Wallace loved and reverenced Christianity, not indeed for its intrinsic excellence, but for her own sake; but the truth, however unwelcome, was beginning to force itself upon her mind, and she felt for the first time, that her position was independent, was isolated, and that although her mind was so naturally inclined to lean upon others, she must stand alone, without human support or sympathy.

When they reached the house, she left Wallace at the foot of the staircase, and retired into her own room. It was yet scarcely twilight, but the evening star looked down from its heaven of blue sky, and the moon had come out to pour its saintly benediction upon the last hours of the day of rest. Agnes loved nature, dearly. The hour of sunset was, she hardly knew why, hallowed in her heart; and she had often heard the voice of God, as if walking now, as once of old, in the paradise of His creation; but to-night, instead of recognising Him in His works, nature seemed but as a thick vail to hide Him

from her sight; and while she gazed upon the hazy horizon, and one and another star came out in its brightness, it seemed to her as if the many worlds had hung there from eternity, and that man—the child of chance or destiny—was doomed to die, like a faded flower, in the morning flourishing, and growing up, and in the evening cut down, and withered; for she had said in her heart,—ah, she knew not that she had said it even in her heart, what if there be no God—no immortality—no heaven? A cloud had overshadowed her, and she feared as she entered into the cloud.

"O that I knew where I might find Him!" she exclaimed aloud; but the words only echoed in the room as if there were none to answer. She threw herself upon the sofa, turned over the leaves of her Bible; but the Bible itself appeared to her as a sealed book. "Spirit of truth," she said, at length, "Eternal light,—the promised guide of erring man,—Why hast thou left us in our wanderings in the wilderness, to grope our way amid the gloom of impenetrable obscurity? We are strangers upon earth. Death and the grave are before us. Time is bearing us on and on with the generations that are not. Hide not thy commandments from us. But, is it so? Is the truth of God in very deed raised beyond our grasp, or is it not the pride of intellect, or the darkness of our unbelieving nature, that closes our hearts to the reception of it? Still, the word of God is mighty, and can bring down every high thing that exalteth itself against the obedience of the gospel; and the Spirit of God is mighty, and can search into the deep

things of the heart, and illumine its midnight; and the prayer of faith is mighty. Hundreds of years ago, the Hebrew prophet bowed his face to the earth, and prayed. He looked seven times for the answer of his petition; and soon, the little cloud, at first no bigger than a man's hand, spreads over the whole canopy of heaven. The perplexed Hezekiah girded himself with sackcloth, and spread his case before the Lord Jehovah, without regarding the blasphemies of his enemies; and the angel of the Lord went out, and smote the Assyrian in his camp. The church prayed, and the prison doors flew open, and liberated the captive Apostle. If there is truth in revealed religion, there is efficacy in prayer.

"If I cannot resist the influence which is gathering over my soul—if my strength is indeed so small that I am unable to contend with the powers of the evil one, and must fall in the conflict; and he, who sees the end from the beginning, beholds me this night take the first fearful step which shall end in the darkness of unbelief—I choose death rather than life, and I call heaven and earth to witness that I would be willing rather to leave this world, even in this early youth, than surrender my faith, and die at last, an apostate."

Agnes was again composed, and wearied either with her long walk or with the excitement of the evening, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Suspicions amongst thoughts are like bats among birds, they ever fly by twilight:"—
"Suspicions that are artificially nourished, and put into men's heads by the tales and whisperings of others, have stings."

We would that we might steal from the Hall to the parish church, where now, Mr. Smith, in his own earnest manner, is calling sinners to repentance and hope; or they are singing the benediction hymn, or kneeling to receive the parting blessing, in the promised "peace that passeth all understanding."

But our story, be it remembered, is about an Unbeliever; and although, we are loath on this blest holiday, and amid the repose of man and of nature, to advert to a subject, neither lovely, nor of good report, nor in anywise included among those things, whereon we are recommended in Scripture to think; we are assured that should we throw a vail over this part of our narrative, and turn away from the reflections suggested by it, as one would shrink from the touch of death and corruption, our story would only be half told.

Unbelief is not the mere dissent of the understanding to the truths proposed in divine revelation, but a principle, a principle of action; and as the spirit of a living faith sanctifies the heart and life unto God,—like the fabled properties of the philosopher's stone, turning every thing with which it is brought in contact into

gold,—so, the spirit of unbelief poisons or draws up the very fountains of life and happiness, infects the whole heart, and embitters the whole character, and turns even the gifts and blessings of creation into a curse.

Let us learn, then, from the circumstances of the week upon which our friends have just entered, what a blind thing human nature is, although with all her boasted perfection; and refuse to follow her most beautiful instincts unless where Nature leads us, God moves before us, in the pillar of revealed truth; and let us remember that the warmest affection, without christian principle, though it may be secured to us by the strongest natural ties, cannot insure our happiness. The gourd springs up into growth,—its bright green leaves unfold themselves, and its flowers expand in the sunshine, but there is a worm at the root,—its shelter was only for a night, and while we are yet looking, it withers and droops.

We left Agnes asleep. Wallace and Mrs. Fleetwood are in the room below. The Unbeliever is standing by the window, and the moonlight, that falls so quietly upon the couch of the lady above them, lights up the stern contracted brow and bitter smile of the young barrister. The two are alone; and—hush!—they are talking secrets; for Wallace is leaning over his sister-in-law and entreating her to "be merciful and tell him all about it" while the little lady is absent; and she—sly, provoking creature—lays her finger upon her thin, delicately chiseled lips, and shakes her head. Hints, insinuations, and explanations follow. Mrs. Fleetwood has named Mon-

tarre. She associates his name with Agnes; and the Unbeliever looks restless and disconcerted. He has heard of this Montarre before. Is he really the fascinating young foreigner that he has been represented? Is it true that he is in the neighbourhood of Clifton? How is it that he did not succeed with Agnes? Cruel sister Louisa! why does not she tell him all about it? He cross-questions and catechises her, as if professionally; and yet while she is still talking to him with that air of mystery, and before she has told him "half of what she knows," he starts up, and leaves the room, exclaiming with the most perfect nonchalance, "Oh, that's all, is it?"

"Cursed be the tale bearer," says the wise man; but who are they that bring themselves under sentence of this anathema? Those who, at the risk of their own comfort or safety, refuse to consent to the sin of another by concealing it? Those—and here, we fear the fair sex are often at fault—who in the familiar intercourse of social life, through inadvertency, utter something which has been committed to them in the most sacred confidence of friendship? and this, because their minds are so childish, or ill-regulated, that they cannot keep from prating and babbling. Those who wilfully betray a trust reposed in them? We leave it for you to determine; but we ought, in justice to the lady, to explain that Mrs. Fleetwood properly belonged to none of these classes of persons. With regard to Agnes, she could not betray confidence, for she had never been trusted. Neither were her remarks the result of a gossiping in-

discretion; for in truth, she was at liberty to say anything that she knew.

Mrs. Fleetwood was a true descendent of our inquisitive progenitress. She had watched Agnes and Montarre from the commencement of their acquaintance; and observed, that from the day of his introduction to her, the gay young foreigner had been particular and persevering in his attentions to Miss Fleetwood. Still, despite a thousand little womanly artifices to ascertain the real state of the case, she could never fully satisfy herself from her sister, whether he had formally avowed himself her lover; Agnes having been carefully advised by her father, to preserve the most delicate reserve, especially among her female friends, upon subjects which involve the feelings of another. Having, we are sorry to say, little to occupy her mind at present, and her innate curiosity wound up to the highest pitch by the re-appearance of Montarre in Clifton, so soon after her sister's marriage, Mrs. Fleetwood attempted to come to the truth by working upon the suspicious feelings of Arnold; and although without in a single instance uttering a direct falsehood, she effectually succeeded in exciting in the mind of the Unbeliever the most gloomy sentiments of distrust. This was not what she had intended; nay, it was a thing that she would have justly deprecated. She had been impelled in her mysterious insinuations by motives of sheer curiosity; and uncertain as yet whether her enquiries were successful, she was busying herself with concocting certain other artifices for the accomplishment of her design, when the Unbeliever abruptly

left her. We will not stay to comment upon the conduct of Mrs Fleetwood. Let us not, however, be hasty in pronouncing judgment upon her; but hope that like too many idle and frivolous characters, she deserved no more severe a censure than that once bestowed by the philosopher upon his little dog, "Thou little knowest what mischief thou hast done!"

Wallace determined at once to appeal to his wife; and went from room to room, enquiring, "Where is Agnes," until it at length occurred to him that she might be yet at her toilette. So it proved. Startled from her sleep by the sound of his footstep on the staircase, the little lady was arranging her hair at the glass, by moonlight, when her husband opened her room door.

"Wallace, I have actually been asleep!" she exclaimed.

"Nonsense! have you, indeed?" said the Unbeliever, laughing with her, "I thought you must have gone to the Rectory, for I have been seeking for you every where; but Agnes, my dear girl," he added, drawing her towards him as she was shrinking from the vivid light of the candle he held in his hand, "I have been longing to be alone with you; for there is that young foreigner—hem—Montarre, I believe is his name. He is spending the evening with Richard, but—we shall meet him at supper directly"—

"Well?" said Agnes, as if impatient to hear what next.

"How is it that you and this young fellow have been on such intimate terms all this time—flirting,—coquetting, or something like it, I mean"—Wallace paused,

and looked anxiously at his wife, but Agnes was toying with her bracelets, and smiling, apparently at her own thoughts. "How is it," added the Unbeliever, "that I have never heard you mention his name?—at least,—never lately."

"Because," said Agnes, carelessly, "I did not think his name worth mentioning. Is it supper time?"

"Is that all?" asked Wallace, with an expression of incredulity, at the same time keeping the candle in his hand, and his penetrating eyes fixed upon Agnes, as if he would read her whole soul.

It was not all. Since Agnes had discovered the peculiar disposition of Arnold, she had carefully avoided alluding to any subject that might give him the slightest ground for suspicion. To Montarre, she had really a girlish aversion; and she had repeatedly rejected his attentions, with all the firmness of which her gentle nature was capable. Aware, however, that Wallace was unable to appreciate the force of the religious scruples and objections, which she had often urged as obstacles to her marriage with himself, and fearing lest he might attribute her feelings to a preference to the handsome young foreigner, she had never mentioned the perseverance of Montarre from the day that Arnold left her for the continent. At this moment, she felt as if she had been keeping back something, which in the unrestrained freedom of mutual confidence, ought sacredly to have been laid open. She hesitated, and turned away from his scrutinizing gaze. Wallace changed his position, and repeated his question, and then, half laughing, Ag-

nes said "*that* was what she called cross examination, and that she would not be catechised either about Mr Montarre, or Mr. any body else; and that, if that was all he had got to say to her, it was but little," &c., &c.

"So," persisted the Unbeliever, his expression of countenance becoming every moment darker, "I am to be indebted to Mrs. Fleetwood for the particulars of this affair of yours."

"I have never made Louisa *my* confidante, and I never shall do so," said Agnes, pouting. "Suppose," she added, speaking the simple truth, but incautiously, "I was afraid of making you jealous of Montarre."

Wallace did not like this; he looked as if he did not, but quickly answered, "What a child you are, Agnes! Did you know that Montarre liked you? Then, why did he not succeed with you?"

"What a question for *you* to ask!" said Agnes, indignantly.

"Then, Agnes, my dear girl, if you have the heart of a woman, how could you thus keep love alive by administering just as much encouragement as would keep Montarre at bay, without repulsing him altogether,—torturing your miserable victim, and retaining him in your power, only to gratify a despicable relish for admiration!"

"Wallace!" Agnes began, but instead of finishing the sentence she answered him by the silent appeal of her expressive eyes; and he understood their language, for turning from his wife, his mind in the same moment quickly adverting to his conversation with Mrs. Fleet-

wood, he exclaimed, "I don't believe it, Agnes—I don't believe one word that you have uttered since I came into the room."

"Oh Wallace, trust me!" said Agnes, passionately, and with some impatience.

But the Unbeliever was silent; the demon of distrust had got possession of his soul, and his eye refused to meet her glance of pure, confiding affection.

"You are harsh, Wallace," said Agnes, smiling, but through her tears. "I wish my father was alive!"

"Forgive me!" said the Unbeliever, quickly changing his tone and manner. He could not bear to see her look unhappy, and was instantly at her side again, with apologies and expressions of regret. In the same moment supper was announced. Agnes ran down stairs into the room below, and when her husband joined her, she was seated at the table with Montarre, and talking to him with an easy familiarity, that might have allayed at once his suspicions. But Wallace Arnold was a strangely constituted character, wonderfully distrustful of his own powers of pleasing; though strong and resolute in purpose, and peculiarly ardent in affection. Restless, and anxious, he was still drawing his own inferences from Mrs. Fleetwood's communications: and when his eyes met those of the brilliant young foreigner, and Agnes introduced "Mr. Montarre," a most uncomfortable feeling came over him. Perhaps his wife observed it; for Mrs. Fleetwood remarked to her husband that his sister yawned several times, when Mr. Montarre was addressing her, although she did not look particularly

sleepy, and she added, "Agnes was silent, too, to-night, Richard, I wonder what had come over her?"

* * * * * *

"What a splendid night!" said Agnes, throwing the window open, and breathing the air, when they again retired to their own room. "What a magnificent Sunday evening it has been!"

She did not know how that evening was destined to throw its shadow over the whole course of her future life.

CHAPTER IX.

"God never wrought miracles to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it."—LORD BACON.

BUT what can have brought Agnes to the Rectory so soon this Monday morning? for there she is, sure enough, and before the early dew has melted off the green grass in the church-yard, or the crazy old parish clock chimed eleven. She says that she is come to enquire after the children; and now, she is nursing Mrs. Smith's baby, while the light hearted little fellow is laughing, and shaking his coral bells, as if his six months life had been all one merry May day; but we have been watching the restless expression of her eyes for the last ten minutes,—eyes are always tell-tales,—and we dare venture to pronounce that Mrs. Arnold has another object in her morning's visit to the Rectory than that of prattling to the little Smiths; and if we mistake not, the Rector of Clifton is of our own opinion, and will soon be in the secret, albeit, he says nothing.

Yes, Agnes had forgotten Arnold's unaccountable suspicions. The little quarrel by moonlight, of which, somehow, we have been witnesses, she had resolved at once, to forget and forgive;—and we may just remark in passing, that the latter, must in such cases, always precede the former,—Agnes, we say, had forgotten her

husband's insinuations, and distrust; but the gloomy impression produced on her mind, by his conversation in the early part of the evening, was not effaced. She did not wish to explain the real state of her feelings to Mr. Smith,—doubts in religion, if deeply felt, and sincerely regretted, are not often expressed even to our dearest friends, but with reluctance,—but Agnes longed that morning for sympathy and direction; and she waited at the Rectory talking about anything or nothing, in the hope that Smith would, of his own accord, as it were, say something calculated to establish her in the Christian faith.

Whether the Rector was actuated by sympathy, or impulse, or what, we know not, but it was certainly not long before he looked enquiringly at his fair visiter, and said, abruptly, and as if he had read all that was in her heart, "Well, Agnes, and are you come to make me your father confessor?"

He had, as we sometimes say, broken the ice, and Agnes relinquished "baby" into the arms of Mrs. Smith, and began to tell the amiable Rector how depressed and uncomfortable she had felt from the influence of Arnold's conversation.

"What has he been saying to you?" enquired Smith. "We must not let you become unsettled."

"Why,—why he has said nothing," said Agnes, simply, "I mean nothing of weight against Christianity; and yet, his remarks have left a cloud over my thoughts and feelings"—and without finishing the sentence, she turned to Mrs. Smith, and reminding her of some ex-

pression in her letter, warning her against her marriage with Wallace, added, "I cannot for a moment regret the step which I have taken, but I begin to be fully alive to the dangers attending it. I had hoped that Mr. Arnold's affection for me would induce him to love my religion; but now I feel that he is rather drawing me with him into the same darkness and unbelief; and if it be possible,—if it be possible for me to doubt and disbelieve against my will, I am satisfied that he is leading me by a force which I cannot resist, and I must lose my own hold of Christianity, and become an apostate."

"But it is not possible," Smith interrupted, "Satan has no unwilling servants. Keep your hold of the truth *in the love of it;* and you shall find that your faith is founded upon a rock, and all the powers of depraved intelligence shall not be able to move you from it."

"But Wallace has a stronger mind than I have"—

"No matter, you are not in your own keeping. The little child, cast upon the river in a rude ark of bullrushes, was as safe in the keeping of his Eternal Father as the powerful leader of God's people, when he stretched his rod over the sea and it divided before him. Fear nothing, only do right. Let me advise you, however, never to attempt to convince Mr. Arnold of the truth of your religion in the way of argument. So far as the historical evidences of Christianity are concerned, he is, I venture to say, better acquainted with the subject than you are. Rather try to bring his mind into a fresh tone of feeling, by becoming yourself a living example of the power of truth. Let him be made to feel that your re-

ligion lies not merely within the four corners of the New Testament, but deep within your heart,—that it consists, not in mere profession,—in outward observances, prayers and creeds and church-going, but in kindness and charity and truth. I do not mean that I should like you to set a watch upon every word and look, and live in habitual constraint lest you should in some way dishonour your Christian character. Be free. Have your heart under the influence of divine love. Live in the exercise of faith and prayer; and leave the result."

"But," said Agnes, "are we not directed in Scripture to be ready to give every man a reason for the hope that is in us?"

"Yes, but we are not thereby required to listen to all the reasons which the enquirer may choose to assign for the unbelief,—the despair which is in him. Even, without directly attacking Christianity, it is not uncommon for its opposers to mix up so much of their own spirit of bitterness, in their conversation on the subject, that the listener becomes infected with it; and perhaps, ere he is aware, his own healthy tone of feeling is impaired by the insidious poison. Besides, on a subject so intricate, it is quite possible to be soon involved in a labyrinth of difficulties, from which, because you cannot immediately extricate yourself, you may imagine that there is no way of escape."

"But is not Christianity capable of being defended?"

"Certainly, it is; but because we cannot directly answer a hard question we must not set it down at once as unanswerable. The Christian religion is surrounded

with a bulwark of historical evidences which renders it impenetrable to the attacks of infidelity; but it is not always easy, in the carelessness of familiar conversation, to detect the sophisms of an accomplished skeptic."

"Well, it is strange, it is mysterious," said Agnes, with a suppressed sigh, "that any one should be left in the dark upon so important a subject."

"How in the dark?" said Smith, "We are none of us in the dark while we keep our eyes open."

"I mean that the evidences of Christianity are of such a nature, that it requires a long course of study before we can become rightly acquainted with them."

"By no means. I have no hesitation in saying that a knowledge of the external evidences of Christianity,—and it is to these I presume that you refer,—do not require that long and tedious course of study, upon our part, that you imagine. It might have been so, certainly, but for the praiseworthy labors of some who are better qualified for it. In our time Paley and others have so simplified and condensed the proofs in favor of Christianity, drawn from a careful examination of historic testimony, that they are adapted to the commonest capacity; and there is indeed scarcely an intelligent school-boy, that minds his books, but can give you a pretty fair outline of them."

"But who disputes the leading facts of the Gospel narrative," said Agnes, "such as that, Jesus, the founder of the persecuted sect that bears his name, lived, and was crucified in the reign of Tiberias Ceasar, under Pontus Pilate, his procurator? &c., &c., Wallace does not,

I am sure: indeed, it is not the historical evidence of Christianity that I have heard called in question,—but"—Agnes stopped, for, in fact, she was unable to express her meaning.

"I understand you, perfectly," said Smith, "It is not for want of evidence, like that to which I have just alluded, that the Christian religion is rejected by the skeptic. It is not, upon such evidence, that the sincere and unsophisticated enquirer receives the gospel, and believes with 'the heart unto righteousness.' It was not the signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds, wrought by the Apostles, that attracted the first converts of the cross—or many more would have believed than did—neither is it the display of historic testimony to the truth, made manifest by the labors of men of research and learning, which commands conviction in our own times. There is evidence enough, whether for the weakest or the wisest of us; but there is such a thing as becoming—not intellectually, but *morally* incapacitated for its reception,—of having the moral taste and feeling so depraved and vitiated that there is no relish,—no perception of the beauty of truth. We have heard of some who said of our Lord's teaching, 'This is a hard saying, who can hear it;' and who, although they had but just witnessed a striking instance of his miraculous power, in the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, turned their backs upon Christ, and his disciples, and walked no more with them: and are there not those in our own day, who, though they may not have conversed with the Divine man of Galilee in his days of humiliation, or

seen his miracles, have yet heard the story of his resurrection attested by evidence the most convincing, and rejected it as an idle tale; and beheld Christianity represented in all the winning fascination of her nature, but have had no eye for her attractions; and read of Christ's miracles of love and mercy, but referred all to a system of hypocritical necromancy; and although they would be ashamed to reiterate the cry, 'He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the prince of the devils,' nay, though they would blush to hear it hinted that they had even so much as thought of a devil—as anything more than a nursery bugbear—they do daily homage to the evil principle, by attributing all that is pure and holy and virtuous to its influence,—putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and saying to evil thou art my good.

You, my dear Agnes, will find it far easier to get rid of the unhappy impressions which Mr. Arnold's remarks may give rise to, by studying the truth itself, than by examining the mere 'environs,' so to speak, of the truth. In other words, let me earnestly recommend to you the enquiry into those evidences of our religion which are called *moral*. Examine the Christian system, and ask yourself whether a scheme so marvellously adapted to elevate, and strengthen, and sustain the human heart, were devised by a man like ourselves. There are three passages in the Epistle of St. John alone, which are to my own mind, at once demonstrative of their Divine inspiration—'God is love,'—'God is light,'—'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'"

"Thank you," said Agnes, rising, "for the interest

which you have always displayed in me; I am half ashamed of talking so much about my own feelings."

"We are but one family," said the Rector, looking thoughtfully at his young friend, as she put on her shawl and bonnet, "Let us not be afraid of opening our hearts to each other, for heaven only knows how much we may need each other's prayers. We cannot see afar off. Every thing here is stamped with a character of mutability; and the sun which smiles so brightly to-day, to-morrow may be obscured by a gathering storm, or rise to shine on heavy hearts."

"Now, don't prophesy evil," said Agnes, half laughing, "but—give me the address of the poor person you mentioned yesterday, and I will go and visit her."

* * * * *

It was one o'clock, the Rector's dinner hour; and having conducted Mrs. Arnold to the garden gate, he returned to the house.

"I told you how it would be," said Mrs. Smith, meeting him at the door, "*I knew*: poor Agnes,—'the wisdom of this world' is a poor thing."

"Poor Agnes," echoed Smith, as he took his seat at the dinner table, "yet if she continue in the spirit of self-distrust, and dependence upon Divine grace, I have no fear for the result. The pride of the human heart is the 'wisdom of this world,' against which we are so repeatedly cautioned in Scripture. Our danger seldom arises from without but from within. We are to enter the kingdom of heaven as little children, and never to lose our spirit of docile, childlike dependence upon our

unseen Father, until we leave this infant state of being and know even as we are known."

"Surely the Almighty would not permit a believer so sincerely pious as Agnes to fall from the faith," said Mrs. Smith, "and yet, I have heard that her father was once a professing Christian, and a member of some religious denomination."

"It is quite correct—I shall never forget the sketch of his character, which I had from one of his early religious associates. Dr. Fleetwood was educated among plain but pious people—educated in the Christian faith; and even in the dawn of life, the Spirit of Divine grace touched his heart. It was the first epoch in his history when he began to *pray*. The duties of the new life upon which he had entered now burst upon his apprehension. He saw a fallen world in the light of revealed truth—his sympathies were awakened, and he threw all the energies of his peculiarly vigorous mind into schemes of active usefulness.

A stranger happened to put a book into his hand,—it was K——'s philosophical system. He read it. Hitherto his life had been one of feeling,—ardent and impetuous in constitution, he had been impelled by mere impulse. Now, he began to *think*. This was the second epoch in his history. Instead of beholding a mass of living beings perishing for lack of knowledge, the world of mind was opened to him, and with both intensity of application and youthful enthusiasm, he gave himself up to the pursuits of literature. He felt that he was in advance of his old associates, and he could not bear with them—he

was no longer 'little in his own eyes,' but self-confident; and becoming wise in fleshly wisdom, he lost that wisdom which is from above. Then he began to *doubt.* This was the third epoch in his life. He had never studied the evidences of revealed religion, and his mind was ill fitted to meet the tide of opposition to the truth which came rolling in upon him—he had ventured beyond his depth, but he was no longer in the ark of safety—and now, the voice of human opinions, like the roaring of the waves, bewildered and confounded him—he had denied the God of revelation, and the God of nature had denied him—he was lost—he was confounded—his moral hemisphere was darkened—and after having been driven from quicksand unto quicksand, he sunk at last a blind and miserable atheist."

* * * * * *

Immediately after dinner the Rector took up his hat and set out to visit a sick man who lived in a distant part of his parish; and in the course of the afternoon he met with a little incident, which because of the reflections to which it gave rise in the usually unsuspecting mind of Mr. Smith, we shall relate just as it occurred.

He had spent some time with the invalid, and afterwards proceeded to return home by a different route, turning towards the woods adjoining the Old Hall, and crossing a dreary, unfertile heath, called by the villagers the Clifton plain. He was still two or three miles from the village, and had walked for a considerable length of time, without seeing a single human form, or hearing anything but the drowsy bleating of the moun-

tain sheep, which were feeding, or trying to feed, on the moor, when a slight declivity brought him at once in view of a lady and gentleman, who were slowly walking down the hill towards Clifton. A nearer approach revealed the two personages to be Mrs. Arnold and Mr. Montarre. Mr. Smith was surprised to meet them there, and we do not wonder that he was so. He expressed his surprise, which was perfectly natural; and then, without giving the subject another thought, saying carelessly, "It is exceedingly hot," he wished Mrs. Arnold, "a good morning," and walked quickly on. He had not proceeded much further, when, leaning over a style, formed by some rude railings which divided the cultivated from the uncultivated land, he recognised Mr. Arnold.

"Ah, you are waiting for them," said the Rector, pleasantly; at the same time raising his hat, and brushing from it a whole swarm of summer flies. "They will be with you directly."

"Who?" said Wallace, carelessly, "My wife? I expected to meet her here; for she has been to see some poor person, on the other side."

"Yes, Mrs. Arnold and Mr. Montarre," said Smith.

In an instant Arnold's dark eyes were rivetted upon the Rector, as if he could not believe that he had heard him rightly, and dared him to deceive. Smith looked him full in the face, and Wallace did not turn away, or move a muscle of his countenance, but stood still, pale as ashes, as if trusting that the Rector would recall the sentence which he had just uttered.

"It—is it late?—my watch is too slow;" said Smith, in the embarrasing interval of silence that succeeded.

Wallace made no reply; and Smith bowed and left him. In a few seconds the Unbeliever recollected himself, followed the Rector, and taking his arm, began with a gaiety quite unusual in him, to talk about the church,—the rectory,—the parish, everything or anything that he thought might possibly be interesting to Mr. Smith, then—withdrawing his arm at the farther end of the field—he expressed his delight to have learnt that Mrs. Arnold had not been alone in her long ramble, hoped that he should meet them in a few minutes, adding, as he uncovered his head and turned away, "What a charming fellow this Montarre is!"

"Yes," said the Rector, who had been listening to his companion's conversation with the air of a man who is not quite sure as to whether he is asleep or awake, "yes, —at least;"—and he cut short the sentence, and walked quietly home.

Scarcely was he out of sight when Wallace recognised the fairy-like figure of Agnes running down the hill towards him. She was alone, and laughing so heartily that she could not speak.

You have been so long, dearest"—Wallace began, but Agnes's merry looks checked him, "What next!" he exclaimed, in a brisker tone taking both her hands within his, and looking into her eyes with what she called impertinent curiosity. "Come Agnes, tell me what has happened,—what nice little piece of absurdity have you to communicate?"

Agnes stammered something about the oddest specimen of human nature, and having run away and left him.

"I have no taste for natural curiosities, if that's all," said Wallace, almost impatiently, "what puppet will be your next object of diversion?"

"Adolphe Montarre!" said Agnes, pressing her husband's hand; for at this moment the tall, elegant figure of Montarre stood before them. Wallace started, his blood ran cold, and a confused train of painful ideas again rushed before his imagination. He insensibly drew his arm round Agnes, and hurried her forward.

"What's the matter, to-day?" said the lady, in a tone between joke and earnest, as soon as the young foreigner was fairly out of hearing, "Why am I to give my old friend Adolphe Montarre the cut?

"Because," said Wallace, "it is dinner time!"

"Why is it?" said Agnes, with some surprise. "Do you know, I met Montarre at the top of the hill, and immediately afterwards, we met Mr. Smith, I remembered last night, and Mr. Smith looked—what's the matter now, Wallace! I am not going to elope with Montarre," she said, suddenly looking up at Arnold, and at once perceiving that the subject was in some way disagreeable to him. She meant it playfully, but Wallace was not just then in a jesting mood; and it was only with a most determined effort that he checked the risings of his irritated feelings, and answered her with kindness. Notwithstanding his assumed good humour, however, Agnes felt that all was not right, and soon

enquired with her characteristic frankness, if she, or any one else had done anything to annoy him.

"No," said the Unbeliever, quickly, "You have done right—you always do right."

Then, with a smile as open as the day, Agnes told him what a pleasant morning she had spent at the Rectory; and how much she valued her old friends the Smiths. "Wallace," she said, "I am actually beginning to wish that you and I lived at Clifton, instead of ——— Square. At all events, let us arrange to stay as long as we can—Can we not contrive to spend the summer and autumn here?

Wallace turned away his head, as if conscious of the rapid change in his expression that followed his wife's suggestion, and unwilling that she should perceive it. He told her that business required his attention in town, and *business* he must not neglect.

"Business!" said Agnes, contemptuously, "We are both rich enough I am sure: what sort of a grasping, plodding, parsimonious piece of humanity would you make of yourself? *I* hate money-getting men."

"Possibly you may," said Wallace.

"You may say *positively*," said Agnes, good-humouredly.

"Unfortunately for you," said Wallace, and this time he spoke under the influence of strong excitement; "you are in a Christian Country, where the law has determined"—

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" exclaimed Agnes, interrupting him, "I thought you were only joking!"

Wallace would have laughed, and said, "I am only joking," but at that moment, his usual self-command forsook him,—he could not laugh,—he could not smile, he could not meet his wife's sprightly eyes,—but he clasped the little hand which he held within his, and pressed it to his lips.

"I thought that it was dinner time, Wallace? said Agnes, looking very mischievous, and they both returned to the house.

* * * *

"Fanny," said the Rector, in his quiet, thoughtful way, as he entered the breakfast room. Mrs. Smith, who was busily employed at her work table, looked up; but Smith only repeated her Christian name, as if it gave him pleasure to pronounce the little word "Fanny," and then, throwing himself upon the sofa, he was soon evidently all-absorbed in some perplexing train of thought. Mrs. Smith resumed her work,—plied needle and scissors, and so forth;—and was just in the act of bisecting a piece of brown holland when the Rector spoke again.

"Well, Leonard?" said Mrs. Smith, enquiringly.

But this time Mr. Smith folded his arms, and sung the Old Hundred, as if all that he meant was that it behoved his wife to listen to him; and albeit his vocal performances were by no means first-rate, Mrs. Smith did listen for some minutes without interrupting him.

"Leonard, have you something upon your mind to-night?" she asked, at length, wearied of having her own name pronounced in vain, in this way.

"Why, Fan, that's just what I have," replied the Rector.

"Now, if I did not think so!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, laying down her work. "Tell me all about it, and let me mix up a little of my common sense with your speculations, and we shall form a right estimate of things between us. What's a wife of mind and education for, if not for her husband's friend and counsellor?"

"And so, you will have it that man is a blundering and unfinished work of nature without woman," said Smith, laughing, "at all events he never comes to a knowledge of truth by entertaining himself with his own soliloquies, and brooding over one idea without communicating it to others. 'Be intimate with one,' says St. Augustine, and thus, the cold ascetic has laid down a maxim which might be taken as the keystone of all that is elevating and endearing in the fabric of human society, and"—

"*I* said nothing of the sort," interrupted Mrs. Smith, her womanly curiosity becoming quite exciting. "What in the world is this that you are afraid of mentioning to me, Leonard? I have not a thought that I would conceal from you for a moment. Speaking to *you* is just thinking aloud with *me*."

"The fact is," said Smith, looking marvellously embarrassed, and stammering, "I—I met a certain young foreigner, with whom you and I happen to have some acquaintance, walking with Mrs. Arnold, on the Clifton plain, this afternoon."

Mrs. Smith contrived to open her blue eyes to at least twice their ordinary dimensions; and in another second she began to laugh so uproariously that the Rector, either

because he thought that such loud laughing was hardly decorous in Rectories,—or, which is more probable, because, with all his amiability, he had no relish for being laughed at,—interposed with an admonitory, "How foolish!"

"What a prologue of fine sentiment for nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith.

"Indeed, my dear Fan," said Smith, as soon as his wife had become composed again, "This is not a subject for—if I could only explain myself—but I feel half ashamed of mentioning my feelings even to you."

"Then, blush, and tell me what you mean," said Mrs. Smith, her own complexion heightening as she spoke, as if by way of keeping the Rector in countenance.

"I can't help thinking, Fanny," said Smith,—and afraid that he was about to say something that might shock her feelings, he looked timidly into his wife's eyes,—"I can't help thinking that this intriguing young foreigner—I mean this Mr. Montarre, has some design upon the affections of our friend Mrs. Arnold, or else that Mr. Arnold thinks so."

"My dear Leonard," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, laughing again, "if Mr. Arnold is losing his senses, I trust you are not:—Yes, I am ashamed of you," she added, in a graver tone, "Agnes is a married woman, and in love with her husband, as every married woman ought to be."

"But if Mr. Arnold should think"—

"Let him think: he has no business to think, and he will get nobody to think with him. The world has penetration enough to see that a happy bride, like

Agnes, is in no danger of becoming intoxicated with the unmeaning, butterfly attentions of a polished coxcomb of a young foreigner. Besides, Montarre has no such design, I'm sure; he is only fluttering about from one pretty flower to another:—it's just the way with those sparkling young foreigners. Such a thought ought not to have been named, Leonard."

"Bless you for your unsuspecting nature!" said Smith, "but let *me* finish my sentence, and explain myself. I have not a shadow of doubt as to Mrs. Arnold's principle, or as to her affection for Arnold; but she is young and inexperienced, and—in short, I am pretty confident that Montarre's attention to her, and her girlish coquettish manner of receiving it, have given rise to some unhappy suspicions, in the mind of poor Arnold." Taking advantage of his wife's momentary silence, Smith went on to describe more minutely the circumstances of his interview with the Unbeliever, on the Clifton plain.

Mrs. Smith became interested, and listened with all attention to the recital.

"I love that society," continued the Rector, as soon as he had finished the story of his afternoon's ramble, "I love that society which is so encircled with its own purity that nothing that defileth can enter,—where confidence opens and expands itself like a flower in its native soil, no canker worm of suspicion folded within its leaves,—where no tongue of slander is busy in its insinuations; and so holy, simple, and confiding is the union of the sons of God, that if even Satan himself, came up to 'present himself' with them, the cloven foot

would hardly be recognised. But we must remember that it is not among such trusting souls as these, that Arnold has received his impressions of manners or of men,"—

"Or of women," observed Mrs. Smith.

"Arnold moves in a circle, unhappily, almost as distinct from ours in its morals as in its faith; and many things which to us may seem absurd and unnatural, may in his eyes, appear under a totally different aspect. What do you think about it now, Fan? Are you sure that you have seen nothing in his conduct that would lead you to the same conclusion as myself?"

Now, Mrs. Smith was one of those singularly feminine characters, who are born to be loved and led by others; and may Heaven always send such characters men of equal intelligence and christian feeling with Mr. Smith. Her husband was not only the idol of her affections, the high priest of her religion, but the arbitrator of her will,—her sole appeal under Heaven; and thoroughly womanly, both in heart and mind, although she has maintained her own opinion for one minute perhaps, and with a positiveness that amounted to dogmatism, in the next she has been invariably won over to the (as we think) better judgment of the Rector, and contended for the opinion of Mr. Smith with equal warmth and tenacity.

This little digression is to prepare us to hear that, before he had done speaking, Mrs. Smith was looking as thoughtful as her husband; and telling him of several incidents which had fallen under her own observation,

and which were, as she thought, corroborative of his statements. Smith then proposed that his wife should—with a little of her nice womanly tact—make Mrs. Arnold perceive, without seeing, that these attentions of Montarre were somehow disagreeable to Mr. Arnold; for thus, cautiously and ambiguously, the Rector chose to express himself upon the subject. Mrs. Smith was at first a little startled at his suggestion; but Smith urged her so strongly, reminding her how Agnes was an inexperienced girl, and *she* her most intimate female friend, &c., that Fanny at length consented to yield to his wishes. After about an hour's further deliberation, it was agreed, that Mrs. Smith should take the responsibility of communicating with Agnes on the matter, entirely upon herself, and conduct it in the best manner that she could. She formed her own resolution at once, but declined to inform Smith of her plans, as she wished to be able to tell Agnes that it was all her own doing. She determined to write a letter to Mrs. Arnold, explaining her fears, and thus, to avoid the painful task of conversing with her *viva voce* upon so disagreeable a subject; and leaving Leonard to his own reflections, and the children asleep in their cribs, she set herself in real good earnest to endite the epistle.

CHAPTER X.

If 'twere well done when it were done; then 'twere well 'twere done quickly."

Don't let the assertion startle your credulity! It certainly did occupy Mrs. Smith for three whole days,—the composing of this epistle—and when she actually saw it, not drawn up merely, but written and folded, and sealed with her own seal, which was inscribed with the pretty name of Fanny, so distrustful was she of her own judgment, that because she could not shew it to Mr. Smith, she retained it in her desk for the three succeeding days.

The letter was destined to see the light, however,—whether for weal or for woe we will not determine;—and on the following Sunday evening, when Mrs. Arnold happened to be at church alone, Mrs. Smith,—who it would appear, had carried the epistle about her own person,—contrived to meet her friend at the church gates, after the service was concluded, and putting it into her hand, she said, with an air of much mystery, "Read it when you are quite alone!"

Now Agnes,—poor, innocent girl, judged at once that the neatly folded epistle, in Mrs. Smith's handwriting, was no other than a receipt for some family medicine, which her friend, with proper caution designed that she should keep under her own eye; and she thought

little more about it, until, having retired to her room to put off her shawl and bonnet, the letter fell from her bag. On taking it up, with the intention of laying it aside somewhere, she naturally broke the seal, and proceeded to read its contents. In consideration of your curiosity, we subjoin the epistle.

Clifton Rectory,

"I have been thinking of you the whole day, dear Agnes, and I have at last succeeded in making myself perfectly miserable about you; indeed, I cannot attend to anything else, until as good Mr. Nehemiah used to say, 'I have delivered my soul.'

The fact is, there is one amongst your friends, your acquaintances, at least, whom both Leonard and I heartily dislike,—no other, in short, than that heartless and flippant young foreigner, who never leaves you if he can help it, and is for ever paying you his execrable compliments, and doing his very best to look irresistible. Now, don't start with indignant astonishment. I know that you have not observed it. Your heart is too full of love for another, and he dare as soon die by his own cowardly hand as breathe one disrespectful word in your ear; but he may not the less surely succeed in ruining your peace. I have watched Mr. Arnold for some time, and am pretty confident that he is annoyed by Montarre's attention to you; and it is because I am sure that you have not noticed it, and will continue to treat this intriguing young man as kindly as we always do treat people when we are very happy ourselves, that I venture to mention the subject to you. The circumstances of

your husband's early life, acting upon a somewhat suspicious temper, and strengthened by the fearful principles he has imbibed, have made him diffident of his own powers of inspiring affection; and groundless though his fears may be, I verily believe that he already thinks that he is losing you.

Do, my dear Agnes, act cautiously; and make Mr. Arnold tell you all that is in his heart, and tell him all that is in yours; for I am convinced, that the only hope for happiness with our friends of his disposition, lies in the most transparent confidence. Listen to my advice for this once; and whatever may be the changes of this uncertain world, always believe in the love of

Your affectionate

FANNY SMITH."

Before Agnes had finished the letter her breast heaved convulsively, and her cheeks were crimson with burning indignation and surprise. She reached the last line and read it; and then, letting the paper fall from her hand, she threw herself back in her chair, and would have given way at once to a burst of passionate feeling, but raising her eyes in the same moment, she met the enquiring glance of Wallace, riveted upon her, with an expression of the most fervent affection. He had followed her to her room a few seconds before,—entered unobserved, and surprised to find her employed in reading a letter, evidently of so much interest, had stood for some time a silent witness of her agitation.

Without uttering a syllable Agnes threw herself into his arms, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Agnes! my adored Agnes—what can have happened?" said Wallace, passionately, "Speak for heaven's sake."

But Agnes could not speak; she only buried her face more closely against him and struggled to repress her feelings.

"What's that cursed letter about?" exclaimed the Unbeliever, glancing for a single moment at the epistle, as it lay upon the carpet. He stooped and took it into his hands, in the instant his eye fell upon the name of Montarre. Without reading another word he threw the letter into the fire, and watched the flame, and the sparkling embers that consumed it, with gloomy exultation.

"Wallace, Read it," faltered Agnes.

"I would not,—it was not intended for me," was the answer.

"Oh Wallace, did you ever distrust me?" enquired Agnes, rousing herself.

"No,—no,—no, my love," he answered, bending over her and gazing on her face with a lover's fondness.

"Never?" said Agnes—

"Never,—by heaven," said the Unbeliever, firmly; and the demon in his soul mocked at the deception he was practising upon the confiding girl, and told him that he distrusted her at that very moment.

"Then we are one," said Agnes; "no,—lay your hand upon mine again, and let us feel that there is not a grain of dust between us,—that we can see into each other's hearts and be happy. I cannot go down to sup-

per just yet; but do not leave me, Wallace. I had a strange, fearful dream, last night, and since I read that letter I had almost fancied it fulfilled. I thought that you and I were walking side by side; but the world was dark, and the way was lonely; and as we were going on through life together, suddenly, you stopped, and told me that I should be happier without you; and then, with one hurried embrace you left me; and though I tried to call you back, and to follow you, I was paralised,—I could not move or speak to say that you were deceived, for my voice was stifled,—and I awoke, and it was only a dream."

"Silly, superstitious Agnes," said Wallace, coaxingly; for he imagined that the dream was only the reflection of her feelings during the day, and something like self-reproach rose in his heart. "Yes, it was a dream, for I am here in the reality of life and affection. Come, don't spoil those divine eyes with crying, but let me brush your hair,—and do doff that divinity colored dress, for it looks as if it had been made at the Rectory—now, tell me what the letter was about, and whom it was from"—

"From Mrs. Smith"—Agnes began.

"—— take the Rector and all his family!" said Wallace, angrily, "You must not go to the Rectory, Agnes. Do you understand me? you must not go even into the parsonage,—Rectory lane or whatever it is," he added, laughing, "you must not go near the Smiths for this week or the next,—now, promise me that you won't: —but I had quite forgotten that Louisa was waiting

supper," and pronouncing these words he ran down stairs to apologise to Mrs. Fleetwood for their delay, intending to return immediately to his wife's room.

Agnes followed him, however; and in a few seconds entered the dining room, looking so bright and happy that none could have guessed the cause of her detention. But now, the Unbeliever became gloomy and thoughtful. His gaiety had only been assumed to sooth and pacify his wife's feelings; and he brooded over the events of the evening with distrust and uneasiness. Agnes could not be insensible to the change that had come over her husband; she felt it in every look of his eye and tone of his voice, but she did not understand it, and knew not how to account for it. Poor girl,—she knew not that there lurked beneath his appearance of gentleness and affection, an under current of suspicious feeling, that threatened, every moment, to break out in some unhappy ebullition:—she knew not how the bosom on which she reposed with the guilelessness of confiding affection was often tormented with a hell of anxiety, of which, she herself, with her childish gaiety and good humour, was the unconscious cause;—and Wallace,—deep in his own purposes—trembled to reveal it. His love to Agnes was fervent and passionate, but jealous and suspecting as his own soul. He looked upon her as his own property,—his by the right of conquest; but he had never yet learnt to treat his captive as he wished her to treat him. He had never dared to confide in her; for even with respect to a mere human affection, it might be said of him, that unbelief had blinded his heart.

* * * * *

"Agnes," said the Unbeliever, that same evening, after they had retired to their own room, and he turned to his wife who was star gazing on the balcony, "Agnes, tell me, were you never afraid of losing me during my long absence on the continent?"

"Oh, dear Wallace, what a serious loss that would have been," she replied, carelessly, "No, I trusted you."

"Because you were such a fascinating little beauty? Eh, Agnes?"

"Because I believed you;"—

"But, Agnes," added the Unbeliever, "affection must be touched gently, tenderly, must it not, like the soft downy wings of the butterfly, or we should extinguish it even in our eagerness?"

"Fie, Wallace, the butterfly!—To compare affection to that

'Silly fluttering thing,'
'Ever, ever on the wing,'

as the old spelling book used to say I remember; it is much more like—like"—

"Like what!" asked Wallace, resuming for a moment the good humour of his better nature.

"Well, like the mighty ocean," said Agnes, the depth of which is known only in heaven; but on whose tranquil bosom the little birds skim sportively, and the confiding bark moves onward to its destined port.

"Who told you so?" said Wallace, thoughtfully, gently drawing her from the balcony as he spoke.

"My own heart."

"Nay, Agnes," said the Unbeliever, "your own coquettish little heart never told you such a lie, although I verily think that it is the most deceitful part of you."

Agnes laughed, and did not care to contradict him.

* * * * *

Notwithstanding Arnold's prohibition Agnes could not rest without seeing Mrs. Smith, and hearing from her own lips, the cause of her singular epistle. She arranged to take tea at the Rectory on the following evening, and, for once, she did not ask Wallace to accompany her; but left him with a hurried, "you will call for me at nine o'clock."

She had hoped to have found Mrs. Smith alone with the children, but it so happened that the Rector was at home, and that he thought proper to remain with the ladies for the whole evening; and uncertain whether he was in the secret as to his wife's communication, Agnes was afraid to ask her friend any questions, or converse with her upon the subject while he was present. In vain did she attempt to give Mrs. Smith some idea of the design of her visit: Fanny would not take the hint; and wondering why Wallace did not come to fetch her home, as she expected, Agnes left the Rectory at last, under the escort of Mr. Smith's servant, or the parish clerk—for we may call him which we please. Scarcely had she passed the garden gate, when some one addressed her by name; and she recognised at once the tone and foreign accent of Montarre. He was instantly at her side, and kindly offering his arm, &c. Annoyed, and even embarrassed, Agnes awkwardly declined his attention, and

hurried forward, making some excuse about wrapping her cloak round her; for had every sentence of Mrs. Smith's epistle been written out in phosporic characters in the darkness, it could not have been more vividly presented to her mind, that it was, just at that moment. But Montarre, whatever other qualities he might possess, had a large proportion of that thing which John Bull has sometimes ironically termed *French politeness;* and he insisted upon conducting the lady to the Old Hall. Agnes persisted that she was sufficiently protected; and now in French, now in good King's English, rejected his services. Meanwhile, Mr. Smith's servant seeing that the lady was so well cared for—as he afterwards told the Rector—and having listened until he was fairly tired by this, to him, 'unmeaning jabbering,' walked quietly back to the kitchen, and when Agnes turned round, she was, as Montarre expressed it, "*alone in these wilderness of desolations!*" There was now no alternative, and without expostulating further she suffered the young foreigner to accompany her to the house.

It was a dark cloudy night,—so dark that when they left the Rector's lane, and entered the plantation, Agnes was half afraid of missing the right path. At the moment she fancied that she heard footsteps behind her, and thinking that it was the parish clerk, who had overtaken them again, she enquired if they had not turned off into the woods. The unknown personage made no answer; and Agnes, who had a childish horror of encountering poachers, instantly conjectured that he was no other than "Long Tom," or "Sly Jack,"—characters

celebrated in the village for their nocturnal depredations —and clung timidly to her companion.

"Who is that?—What is that?" said Montarre.

They both stood still a moment; while the gay young foreigner, in his zigzag foreign accent, enquired the cause of the lady's alarm.

"He is there!" said Agnes, softly, although she felt very much inclined to scream; but no,—it was only the trunk of an old English Oak, standing in its own silence, as it had done for centuries gone by. Montarre, who was not in the least discomposed, stepped forward, but he suddenly hung back, and as if unconsciously, released his hold of Agnes, and she dashed off from the path into the plantation, and never stopped until she reached the Hall door, when she was seized with a violent fit of coughing, with the exertion.

As soon as she had recovered herself a little, she related the adventure to her brother and sister. Richard laughed heartily, said that Montarre was a French coward, and that Agnes was nervous, and so forth; and dismissed the subject, by asserting unequivocally, that the mysterious unknown was Timothy the game-keeper, who had been to the Hall for the key.

But where was Wallace?—Nobody could tell. He had gone out early in the evening,—before seven o'clock, with no other companion than his dog. Fedo had found his way home, some time since; but the dumb favorite could give no tidings of his master, although urged by repeated caresses. Upwards of two hours elapsed before the Unbeliever appeared; and when at length he en-

tered the room, and everybody enquired where he had been, he rather increased than diminished curiosity, by his eager and evasive manner of disposing of their questions. It was late, and Mr. and Mrs. Fleetwood soon retired. Wallace and Agnes remained below, and as soon as they were alone, Agnes gently reproached the Unbeliever for neglecting to call for her at the Rectory.

"My dear Agnes,"—Wallace began, "Yes,—I am afraid that you will have thought me very unlike myself this evening, but—the fact is, I have become acquainted, within the last few hours, with circumstances which will require my immediate attention at B——. It is not a great distance—and I ordered the carriage before I came in, for"—

He had spoken so calmly,—so dispassionately,—that Agnes was only startled when he came to the last sentence.

"What!" she exclaimed, rousing herself at once; for she had begun to feel excessively sleepy. "You are not going now!"

"Directly," replied her husband, retaining the same self-possession as before. "I must leave you in a few minutes. Have you anything particular to say to me?"

"No!"—said Agnes, thoughtfully, and enquiringly. "You are joking, Wallace—You won't go to-night?"

"Agnes,—Have you been to the Rectory this evening?" he asked.

Agnes replied that she had; and she trusted that he believed her, as she believed him. "But you won't go yet;" she added, "Wait till the gray dawn looks in upon us, and morning mists begin to rise; it is nearly

twelve o'clock, already,—I should like to go with you and watch the sun rise."

Wallace turned away, and a cloud passed over his countenance as he answered, "No,—it is something very urgent—about that case—I—mentioned to you,"—

"What case?"

"Never mind, you do not understand these things." He rose up quickly, and left the room; in a few seconds he returned again, came close to Agnes, and placed his hand upon her head.

"Wallace," said his wife, enquiringly; "your hand is so cold," and she again urged him to remain with her.

"Ask me to stay once more," replied the Unbeliever, "and neither Heaven nor Hell shall move me from you!"

Alarmed at his earnestness and emotion, and much mistaking the cause of it, Agnes at length consented that he should go, only begging that he would tell her all about it, when he returned; "and you will come back again in a few hours," she said, embracing him.

"I will try,"—said Wallace, "Good night," and he left the room,

Agnes felt lonely, and depressed—she scarcely knew why—and before the sound of the carriage wheels had died away in the distance, she opened the room window, and sat, breathing the damp cold air, and watching for her husband's return: but no,—one o'clock—two o'clock came—and she heard the church clock chime slowly, and die away; and then, she retired to her own room, and—little thinking what dark events hinged in the transactions of those few short hours—she soon fell asleep;

CHAPTER XI.

"So quick trode sorrow on the heels of joy!"

MORNING rose over the pretty village of Clifton. The sun shone merrily, and the earth looked green and beautiful; and again, man came forth to his daily labor, until evening.

The morning was not what might have been predicted from the quiet of the preceding night. The smiling landscape, indeed, lay there in her sunshiny robes—as if in all the pride of conscious beauty; but a rough north breeze came sweeping over it from the hills in the distance,—fleecy summer clouds were shifting about the blue heavens—like pilgrims seeking for a resting place, —while every tree, from the slender sapling in the plantation, to the stern oak that stands like a patriach in the forest, was moved; and even the stately yew sighed from its dwelling among the tombs, and shook its bushy head to the blast.

* * * *

A strange rumour had reached the ears of the good people at Clifton that morning;—it was but a rumour, a vague, indefinite story that had been carried to them as if by a bird of the air, or in the hollow murmuring of the wind,—Heaven only knows how;—and although it excited amazing interest among them, there were few

that did not shake their heads when they repeated it, and breathe a fervent wish that it might be "but a tale —a village tale!"

* * * * *

But the rumour soon reached the inmates of the Old Hall, and Agnes was awakened at an early hour, by the confused sound of voices in the adjoining room. She opened her eyes—and before she had time to recall the circumstances of the past night—rose up, hastily, and rung the bell for her maid. There was a gentle tap at her room door, in the same moment, and Mrs. Fleetwood entered, with a note in her hand, which, after a little hesitation, she presented to her sister. Although it was defaced and blotted, Agnes recognised at once the handwriting of her husband, and eagerly broke the seal. The epistle was briefly expressed, thus,—

"Montarre is dying at the Green Lion, and, before you have received this, I shall have embarked where I defy human effort to follow me. I leave you to speculate as you please upon the cause of the quarrel which has terminated so fatally.

WALLACE ARNOLD."

Agnes read it,—she spelt every word,—she perceived that it was, in very deed, Arnold's own writing; yet she could not at first understand him. She could not believe, or rather she could not realise, even in imagination, the event that had transpired;—a mist was before her eyes, and she felt like one in a dream. At length, the truth,—the dark, appalling truth sunk into her heart, like a death warrant. For a few seconds she

stood—pale as an image of alabaster—and clasping Arnold's note—like a sinking mariner grasping a life preserver;—but soon, her hand relaxed its hold, and, as one smitten with the breath of the destroyer, she sunk again upon her bed, and was mercifully relieved with a fit of unconsciousness.

The village surgeon was called, in all possible haste; for her friends were alarmed for her reason. Various were the restoratives that were applied, and for some time, without success. But Agnes was not destined to end her days in insensibility; and after the interval of about an hour, she evinced symptoms of a return to consciousness,—the consciousness of her misery.

Poor Agnes!—sorrow had stricken her even in a moment, and in the sunshine of her bridal days, and she sunk beneath the stroke; but though crushed and bruised, her heart was not broken. There was yet life in her. She believed that there was a God in Heaven; and looked up in holy trust. She believed that there was truth in man; and although appalled at the crime in which his suspicious and passionate temperament had involved her husband, and despite his strange and unnatural conduct, she never for a single moment doubted his affection. She forgave him all, and feared only lest, in the tumult of his conflicting feelings, he should die by his own hand, and die in distrust and unbelief.

* * * * * *

The surgeon remained at the Hall some time; and afterwards left his patient, desiring that she should be kept perfectly quiet. Agnes was then alone, and with

no bright look to answer hers, and no voice of love to sooth her agitated feelings, she lay upon her couch:—and how did the sunshine of a summer's morning become to her heart like the desolation of a Lapland winter.

The day passed,—yes, it passed like other days; and again evening threw her gray mantle over the earth,—the wind was lulled to rest, and the mellow light of the setting sun fell reflected through the bay window, rested upon the forsaken bride's pale forehead, and died away in the twilight,—little birds sung as if they too had no sympathy with sorrow, but had a fresh tale of love and joy to whisper in the silence of retiring day,—and then, night came on in slow succession,—bright stars looked down from heaven, while thick white mists were creeping stealthily over the green fields. Agnes's maid brought in the evening lamp, and placed it upon the table; but her mistress turned away her head, and shielded her eyes with her hands, for it seemed as if the feeble lamp light oppressed her. Directing her maid to put out the light, "for it was too brilliant," she buried her head in her pillow, and closed her eyes. Nature is exhausted with mental, as it is with bodily suffering; and there are times when we sleep heavily for sorrow. Agnes felt as if the whole weary strife of mortality had, in her case, been crowded into a single day,—and she fell asleep, as one "wearied with the greatness of the way."

* * * *

Meanwhile our village surgeon, who was likewise somewhat of a village gossip, pluming himself upon the

circumstance that he was able to confirm the tragical story, on authority, went forth, straight from the Hall to the Rectory, dealing out his news, piecemeal, to "Jack" or "Harry,"—the blacksmith or the shoemaker, as he passed. Mr. Smith was in the garden, swinging the children on the gate, and caressing the pointer. That was enough. The surgeon took off his hat, and the Rector said "Good morning Mr. ———." Then, shaking his head, although speaking with an air of apparent indifference, like a man who had walked the hospitals and was accustomed to such things, the surgeon asked him if he had not heard that there had been a duel this morning,—a fatal duel, he believed, between Mr. Arnold and Montarre; that Montarre was shot, and that Wallace had left the country, it was said, but that he, the surgeon, feared that he had committed suicide; and all this, without saying a word, or coming home to take leave of his young and beautiful wife.

Mr. Smith was more shocked than surprised. He inquired after Mrs. Arnold.

"But, I think I may as well just step in and look at Mrs. Smith and the baby," said the surgeon, drawing off his gloves at the gate. "She is very ill, sir,—Mrs. Arnold is very ill,—and no wonder,—poor thing!" and forthwith, all intent upon his choice bit of gossip, he followed Smith into the house, and rehearsed the story to Mrs. Smith. Fanny opened her blue eyes wider and wider, and an expression of horror, surprise, and indignation passed over her open countenance like flitting shadows.

"And yet, "observed the surgeon, "though I have just said so, I recall the words, Mr. Smith; I can hardly suppose that Arnold has committed suicide; for you see, sir, he has taken care to provide against the contingencies of this mortal life, by securing to himself, his desk and papers, &c. His old servant, too, is with him. But his design,—his object, Mr. Smith,—yes, I am acquainted with the particulars, Mrs. Smith," he went on, attempting to reply to something which Mrs. Smith had asked, "and I will tell you, ma'am, though as to accounting for it, as to the reason Mrs. Smith, ha, —ha,—ha, 'Love and reason keep no company now a days;'" and, as if this quotation was much to the point, which, by the way, it certainly was not, our village surgeon proceeded to explain. "It seems that there was some little love affair between Mr. Montarre and Mrs. Arnold, when she was Miss Fleetwood; not so very long since, you know, ma'am,—Arnold was jealous of his beautiful wife"—

"Poor miserable Unbeliever!"—interrupted the Rector. It was the only word that he had spoken, since they had joined Mrs. Smith; and he spoke in a tone of such earnest indignation that the surgeon was startled into a digression, and observed "I believe he is an Unbeliever, sir;—I believe you are quite right. Well, sir,—but on Monday,—or Tuesday, which was it? poor Montarre,—what shall I say—just *s'amuser*,—yes, *s'amuser*, took a fancy to run down and bring Mrs. Arnold home, from some place where she had been taking tea,—perhaps, for the sake of a little innocent flirtation

with the lady, who in her present character, instead of pouting and avoiding him, thought there was no harm in treating the young foreigner as an old friend. Arnold met them, however, walking in Fleetwood's plantation; and when his wife was out of hearing, I suppose, he took the opportunity of telling Montarre, just as jocosely as I am telling you, that he had as soon he did not walk so much with Mrs. Arnold. Montarre denied that he had spent the evening with her,—told the truth, in fact. —Arnold gave him the lie, direct, and would accept of no explanation. Then followed the challenge;—and all the rest in a few hours. Well," he added, rising, "Montarre, it is said, can't survive many days; so Arnold is better out of the way; for *his* life would hardly be safe in Clifton, now. *I* for one would not swear black was white to save *him*. Good morning, Mr. Smith, I have several calls to make;" and the surgeon withdrew. Smith followed him, intending as he said, to enquire after Mrs. Arnold and the family at the Hall. Before the surgeon had reached the gate, he suddenly drew back, and looking at the Rector, said with an air of mystery, "That Quaker,—what is his name? He is with Montarre—was with him an hour after the duel. I thought he had given up his practise."

"Israel Nehemiah!"—

"The same," said the surgeon; and before Smith had time to enquire further, his companion was across the church-yard, and talking with the sexton.

Smith walked on towards the Old Hall. Mrs. Fleetwood, who was seated in the drawing-room window,

descried him when he was at some distance; and if she had never wished for a sight of the Rector before, it really relieved her feelings amazingly to recognise his well known figure walking up the avenue.

"How are you, my dear Mr. Smith?" was her abrupt salutation, when he entered the room. "What are we to do—I suppose we shall be in all the papers!" and she took out her handkerchief, and exhibited such symptoms of real, unaffected distress, that we wonder the amiable Rector was not more moved than he appeared.

Mrs. Fleetwood—like all other thoroughly selfish characters—viewed anything of importance only, in so far as her own personal interest and convenience were affected by it. When she heard in the morning that a duel had taken place between Montarre and Arnold, forgetting the existing laws, her feelings were briefly expressed in the exclamation, "Good Heavens! then I shall have sickness in the house for the whole summer, and the very sight of blood makes me ill." Her apprehensions, on that score, were now removed. Wallace and his servant had, it was supposed, left the country; and Montarre was conveyed to the Green Lion. Mrs. Fleetwood had then time for other considerations, and had begun to think of what she called "the vulgarity of the thing," and the unenviable notoriety which the event would give to her family. Mrs. Fleetwood was one of those who—not satisfied with living her own real life, in the Old Hall at Clifton—was perpetually making herself anxious about living an ideal life, in the minds of others. She had received the impression (whether

correct or not we leave it for wiser heads than ours to determine) that a duel was a low, disreputable thing; and she had wound up her feelings to such a pitch of excitement, by thinking on the subject, that had not the Rector arrived when he did, we verily believe that she would have gone to bed in a strong fit of hysterics, and recalled our village surgeon.

Thanks to Mr. Smith—the very tones of whose voice breathed sympathy and affection—she contented herself with declaiming against Arnold, and lamenting Agnes's unhappy marriage. The Rector listened to her for some time, and at length, attempted to pacify her by observing that such things were only too common; and that he did not doubt but the whole affair would soon be forgotten by every one but the parties most interested in it,—'poor Mr. and Mrs. Arnold.' "You have done right in inviting our young friends to Clifton," he said. "It would be hard indeed if you were responsible for the consequences,—the tragical event which has been brought about during their visit. It is better that our good should be followed by evil, than that we should do evil that good may come."

Mrs. Fleetwood made no reply. Perhaps she was thinking of her own foolish artifices, when, simply to gratify an idle curiosity, she roused the demon of suspicion in the mind of the unhappy Unbeliever—we cannot tell. As the Rector was forbidden to see Mrs. Arnold, he felt no inclination to remain at the Hall longer than his visit might be of some use to the family; and having now the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Fleet-

wood more composed, he returned to the Rectory. Grateful for the happiness within his own heart and home, but sad at the recollection of the misery of the world without, he joined Mrs. Smith and the children at the tea table.

"Well Leonard, this is a most mysterious affair," said his wife, "what do you think about it now?"

Smith did not know what to think. "If," he said, "if any one could have told Mr. Arnold the truth before it was too late."

"If Wallace did not believe Agnes, you don't suppose he would have believed you, Leonard," said Mrs. Smith. "It vexes me to think that she will trust him, notwithstanding all. I am sure she will believe he was actuated just in the impulse of passion."

But Smith was not attending to his wife at this moment, but gazing steadily out of the window, as if he "saw some wonder working there,"—even in his own quiet church-yard, which looked as if it would lay embracing its dead, in undisturbed security, until the resurrection morning.

"Poor girl!" added Mrs. Smith; "her heart is so full of love and trust that she will not doubt even an *Unbeliever*. Such false trust can do her no good; but I know, I shall not be able to destroy it."

Smith quickly turned his eyes from the window to his wife, "Destroy it not," he replied with emphasis, "for a blessing is in it." "Blessed are they, so far even as the things of this mortal life are concerned, who have not *seen* and yet have *believed*.—Yes, and they shall be

blessed, though they may learn at length the bitter truth that their confidence has been given to a broken reed; for their sorrow shall be gentle and salutary, as the evening dew when it descends upon the green earth,—unmingled with the tears of self-reproach and remorse. It is true that we must each of us learn, sooner or later, that the world is full of deception; and be made to feel in our intercourse with each other, how few there are whose honest open hearts will answer ours, as face answereth to face in a glass. But let not you or me be the first to initiate any young, and unsophisticated person into this mystery of iniquity. Let them trust, so long as they reasonably can. *The unbeliever is often the dupe.* Nay, I will go further and say of us all,—even those amongst us who have seen much of the world and its wickedness, that we lose little or nothing by the exercise of a generous confidence, but that 'with what measure we mete, it is measured to us again.' Be this as it may, however, we may safely conclude that what we lose in this world is abundantly recompensed in that holy tone of feeling which flows from a heart at peace with itself and with heaven." Smith paused a moment, and then added, "I have a bright thought in my head to-night, love, and must go to B——— to put it into execution."

Mrs. Smith did not yet understand what the bright design was, and it was no wonder therefore that she was inclined to expostulate. No sooner was it explained than she accommodatingly fell in with the wishes of the Rector, and forthwith desired the man,—I have no

better name for him, the same individual who united in himself the distinct offices of coachman, sexton, and parish clerk,—to saddle the horse, directly.

Mrs. Smith was a thoughtful woman; and no sooner had she given the servant his commission, and returned to the house, than,—out of sheer consideration for the man's curiosity, which she conjectured would be profoundly intense,—she went back to the stable, and added, that the Rector was going to B——— to see his old friend Mr. Nehemiah. At the mention of whose name the man smiled, and gratefully acknowledged Mrs. Smith's attention by a significant touch of his red wig; he having at the moment his head uncovered, except with the above mentioned patch of red raiment.

And now, the horse was led round to the front door; and the Rector mounted and trotted off on the Road to B———, where we will proceed at once to meet him.

CHAPTER XII.

"This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach."

WITHIN the suburbs of the town of B——, and not far from the spot where the tragical event of the morning had taken place, is situated a capacious brick house, which we have already referred to under the designation of the "Green Lion." It is a plain, although a substantial building,—its glittering red front relieved with an array of small windows, adorned with shabby white window curtains;—while below, the heavy red door is usually seen thrown open beneath a bunch of brazen grapes, which project forward, and half conceal a faded daub of some dingy animal, said to be designed for a Green Lion, and erected by way of sign. On the left side of the door, a large bay window, stuffed with glasses and drinking cups, belonging, we believe, to the traveller's room, protrudes itself on the observation with seeming significancy; while an expert ostler, short and jockey-like in figure, is commonly seen attending to one or other of his sleek charge in front of the building.

It is a good house for accommodation, and many a tired traveller has passed a comfortable night beneath its friendly roof; though even at the close of the B—— market day, when all is bustle and excitement,—farmer's spring carts or covered wagons are rattling over the

pavement before the door, and the bar room filled with laborers singing alehouse songs and carousing.

It was on the evening of one of these busy market days, that the steady, white horse of the Rector of Clifton, bearing a personage of no less note than the Rector himself, was seen quietly turning its head from the Queen's highway towards the stables of the Green Lion. An occurrence which excited no small sensation amongst the grooms, ostlers, farmer's men, and gentlemen's servants, who were congregated about the aforementioned premises; and who, although they could not one of them have recognised Mr. Smith had they met him on foot, knew him at once, when mounted on his own white horse,—an animal that had been identified with the Rector and his family from the time that it was a frolicsome iron-grey colt.

But what could the Rector of Clifton want within the precints of the Green Lion? Immediately joking, swearing, and gossiping were at a full stop. All fell back in respectful silence; each indulging in conjecture as to the object of his visit.

There was not much time for the exercise of inquisitive feeling; for Smith hastily dismounted, and giving his horse into the care of a bystander, enquired for Mr. Nehemiah. A servant man in plain clothes, instantly stepped forward, and conducting him into the house, led him up a long flight of stairs to the door of a certain upper room; here he left him, and Smith gently lifted the latch and entered the room.

There, screened even from the light of the evening

sun by a heavy green blind, and shut out as much as possible from the merriment and carousing below, a feeble invalid tossed restlessly from side to side upon his bed; and although he looked faint and weary, eagerly stretched his feverish hands, and moved them over his cool bed sheets. Nodding in her arm chair by his side, sat an elderly woman, attired in decent, servant-like apparel, who had been sent for from a neighbouring hospital, to attend the feeble patient; while a gentleman of about the middle stature, and habited in the quaint costume of a Quaker, gazed upon him with an air of enquiring interest, as he stood at the foot of the bed and rested his head against the bed post.

Smith stepped back, and concealing himself from the observation of the invalid behind the thick folds of the curtains, beckoned with his hand to his attendant. The Quaker, without betraying the slightest symptom of surprise, raised his finger to his lips, but did not move from his position.

An interval of silence succeeded, which was only interrupted with the restless tossing of the poor invalid. The Rector remained standing; and gazed upon the vivid picture of life and death, that was presented before him.

There lay a young man, around whom the curtains of midnight were fast gathering, even in the morning of life. One who was dying for his own folly, and as if by his own hand;—who had dared the fury of the destroyer, and played with weapons of destruction and pistol balls as if they had been childs ninepins,—and trifled

with life and time and death;—yet one who had never looked for any home beyond earth, and the grave; or sought for any happiness, beyond the gratification of the moment; or breathed a prayer to the Great first Cause of all things; or enquired, what is truth; —for his life had passed away, like the sunshiny summer of a giddy butterfly, and the hour of his death was rapidly approaching. Was not such a life "*madness*," and such a death "*without honor?*

By his side was the earnest philanthropist,—the man, whose benevolence and charity were ever burning like the fire on the Jewish altar; and whose life, like that of the first Christian apostles, had long been a beautiful comment on the declaration, "None of us liveth unto himself."

After the lapse of a few minutes, the young man raised his head about an inch from his pillow, and staring wildly at the woman, in the arm chair, exclaimed, with unnatural energy, "Nurse what did my tormentors say to-night?"

The nurse started to her feet, with a suppressed yawn, —"Care and quietness, sir,—Care and quietness," she answered, "Did you want anything, sir?"

The invalid pointed feebly to a small bottle, containing a sleeping draught, which his surgeons had just left him.

"Only half of it," said the woman, "Strong wine, is this, sir. More than half of it would finish either of us;"—and she shook her head, significantly, as she poured the half of the bottle into a wine glass, and pre-

sented it to the invalid. The young man raised it to his hot lips, and the woman resumed her seat. In a few seconds she was again in a state of easy unconsciousness, nodding stupidly in her arm-chair. The young man sunk into his pillow. Then the Quaker, moving noiselessly from his corner by the bed, passed from the invalid's room to the hall below, and beckoned to Smith to follow him.

"I will not detain you a moment," said the Rector, laying his hand upon the arm of the quaintly attired gentleman, and looking at him with the air of a man that has forgotten his errand; "I will only detain you for a few seconds."

"Well, how does thee do, friend Smith?" enquired the Quaker, in a low tone of voice.

The salutation seemed to arouse Smith to a sense of the reality of things, for he quickly answered, "Is there any hope for poor Montarre, Nehemiah?"

His companion shook his head. "Friend," he replied, "thee knows that I have attended hospitals, and infirmaries, and visited those, whom God hath visited with his judgments; but never before have I sat by the death-bed of one who has fluttered into the grasp of death, like a silly moth into a lighted candle. What can I say, if haply I may lead him to *think* who never *thought* since he was born;—for, as thy soul liveth, friend Smith, I cannot tell."

"You may smooth the passage to the grave," said the Rector, "but I fear that you can do no more."

"Then, I cannot even do that," said Nehemiah,

quietly, "for who can talk of a time of retribution beyond the grave without injecting fearful misgivings in the mind of one, who is already appalled at the prospect of death. Lighten not such a man's eyes, but let him die even as the brute dieth.—'Let him sleep the sleep of death.' Poor Montarre! although vague recollections of the errors of his past life seem to float before his imagination, he has no idea of any religion,—he acknowledges no divine revelation,—he believes in no God. Believes, did I say?—he has never thought upon the subject. In a world of death like this, he has never enquired after, or hoped, or looked for a Resurrection. Oh Heaven! and is this the return which man,—feeble, dying man—whose days are passed like a tale that is told or a shadow that declineth,—is this the return that he makes for the revelation of life and immortality?

But what hast thou got to say to me, friend Smith?"

"I want you to make some enquiry after poor Arnold."

Nehemiah's countenance fell "Wherefore?" he asked.

"There is mercy for all," said Smith.

"Haply not for the Unbeliever," replied Nehemiah, "for he closes his heart to the reception of it. But what is this Arnold to thee, more than the unfortunate man whom he has wounded to death?"

"I come in the name of one, to whom he is unhappily every thing,—his wife, you will remember her as Miss Agnes Fleetwood;"—and he explained the state of Mrs. Arnold's health and feelings.

"Poor child," said Nehemiah, "I remember her well. But she is better without him. His own life is forfeited —let him go."

"If she knew where to follow him," said Smith.

"If all was done in the passion of the moment, in a childish quarrel about a lie,—'Thee tells a lie,—I say, thee lies,' and so forth,—doubt not but Arnold will soon find means of communicating with his wife. The man up stairs is not aware that he bears to him any ill will. If it is otherwise, however, if he have left thy friend Agnes in distrust and aversion, would thee recall him?"

The amiable Rector hesitated, "I know not," he said, at length.

Nehemiah smiled. "Well, I will do what I can," he answered, "but mind;—thee does not expect to hear from me unless my efforts are successful. Meanwhile, tell the poor young lady to remember the German proverb, 'The old God is still alive;' for, 'it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Happy are they who feel that the law of their destiny is a law of love,—that love is, as it were, the guiding star of their existence. And this Wallace Arnold is a skeptic, is he?"

"An Unbeliever to the very heart's core," said Smith, "and earnest in propagating his opinions."

"Ah, so it is,"—said Nehemiah. "It is strange, passing strange, that man is not tired of prating and drivelling against that system of divine truth which proposes to elevate him to happiness and immortality. Christianity is assailed as if, instead of humanizing and

blessing society, its influence was designed to make man a brute or a savage,—an outcast from his fellows,—like the miserable and loathed leper. Not a scheme of heathen philosophy, that has been laid by in the dust and corruption of by-gone ages, but some one finds it out,—his ingenuity purifies and modernises it, and tries to turn it to account in his attacks against the truth. Every new discovery in science is seized upon with greedy eagerness, pressed into the service, and made a fresh rallying point to the skeptic or the infidel. But they know not what they do. They have never beheld Christianity in the attractive loveliness of her nature;—they know not the holiness and divinity of that system which they would dishonor with their execrations, any more than the excited rabble, that gathered around the cross of our Saviour, and cried, 'Crucify him,' recognised in the condemned sufferer, the Son of God. Friend Smith, there is a spirit abroad,—but thee dwells on the 'delectable mountains,' and may not have noticed its influence. There is a spirit, stalking about our streets and cities *ad libertum;* nay, finding its way even to the most obscure cellars or garrets of the poor,—a spirit that once, I am willing to believe, has dwelt in a fair and happy form, but that has been so long bound in silence by the fetters of religious intolerance, that reason gave way; and though released from her shackles, she is at last come forth amongst us, a wild and furious demoniac, whom, even the light of heaven's sunshine dazzles and bewilders. Thee sees that I am meaning the spirit of enquiry, friend Smith,—*free* enquiry as it

is called. But it is time that I returned to Montarre. —My love to thy wife and boys."

They shook hands and separated. The Rector returned to the stable for his horse, and in a few seconds was again mounted, and riding on the road to Clifton; his face and heart turned towards the Rectory.

Nehemiah withdrew to the apartment of the invalid, and remained with him during the night. Montarre was frequently delirious, talked incoherently, but apparently suffered little. Two days afterwards the attending surgeons remarked that a slight change for the better was perceptible in their patient, and ventured to give some slight hope of his recovery. Nehemiah retired to rest in his own room, and the old woman slept in her arm chair.

She had slept long; and when she awoke it was past midnight. She started up, and would have mistaken the pale light of the moon for the shadows of declining evening, but that the busy sound of voices below was hushed, and the cry of the nightly watch fell harshly upon her ear. She approached the bed-side of the invalid. How pale he looked in the gloomy moonlight, and yet, how soundly he slept! She leant her ear close to his lips. With a cry of alarm she rushed to the room of Nehemiah; and in another second they were both by the bedside. Nehemiah held the patient's hand, but the pulse of life had ceased to beat,—his head had sunk heavily in his pillow. Poor Montarre was dead!

Nehemiah looked for the medicine phial containing his sleeping draught, which had been left upon the table

by the bed. He shook it,—it was empty. The feverish invalid had swallowed the contents of the bottle in a moment of delirium, and while the old woman slept. A few days afterwards the Coroner's verdict was returned accordingly. Nehemiah left B——— for London in the same week.

CHAPTER XIII.

"To die;—to sleep;—
To sleep! perchance to dream;"—
—"but O yet more miserable!
Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave."

IMMEDIATELY after the duel Wallace repaired with his servant to ———, and having secured berths on board the Liverpool, a vessel bound for New York, awaited her departure in a small hotel, in one of the most obscure parts of the town.

There, in a dark room, overlooking the stables, we may see him as he stands alone,—his head racked with agonizing thoughts of the future, his heart—for the Unbeliever had a heart—bleeding to death for the past.

He had glanced at self-destruction, for all that had rendered life desirable to him was now embittered; and nothing remained, but a yearning appetite for something which he had lost,—a feverish, unhealthy burning for pleasures which were gone. A letter written to a friend at a distance, and dated the day that he left B—— will perhaps best express his feelings.

"My friend,—if I have a friend on earth,—My dear L——— can you say something to comfort me, or must my heart burst with the weight of its own life-blood? for I am undone,—I am lost to earth and happiness for ever.—I am miserable as Hell itself. My life, which

with the exception of a few short months, has passed away like a tedious dream of sorrow, now stares me in the face in the glaring reality of truth; and bids me turn and curse the day when I was born,—born and orphaned in the same hour! To be short with you,—you know the circumstances of my marriage with the daughter of my late friend, Dr. Fleetwood; and how the beautiful girl has been keeping me at bay with her caprice and scruples for several years. We were married on the twenty-eighth of last May; and although my little Agnes faltered, and her white hand trembled, even at the Altar, fool that I was, I thought that she loved me as I loved her; and I half fancied that I could trust her as one trusts one's own soul. Oh, Heaven!—how could I be so deceived. We had passed but a few, a very few months at Clifton, at the house of her brother, when I began to feel that although loved, wooed and caressed, her affection for me, if she ever had it, had withered even in my arms, and her warm heart throbbed for another.

You are wondering how I became so soon acquainted with it. It is no matter. Indeed I can hardly explain: for who can tell how an unwelcome truth fights its way into his heart; slowly and steadily it comes over him, like the setting in of the shadows of evening, until the last ray of hope fade away, and his sun sets in the midnight of black despair.

Yesterday, a circumstance, trivial enough in itself, at length, roused me. L———, I have learnt, that there is a single sentence of truth in the Bible, though

all the rest of it be mere fable:—'Love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave.' I had long hidden my suspicions within the silence of a wounded spirit, like a disappointed lover; but now, I was eager for revenge, I thirsted with an impetuous longing for the blood of my accursed rival.

Montarre had, by some appointment made by note on the Sunday previous, spent the evening with my wife; I met them afterwards walking in the plantation,—I expostulated with him. He denied that he had ever seen Mrs. Arnold except for a few seconds. I gave him the lie, and we met at daybreak. Montarre and I fired in the same moment. He fell instantly. I felt something whiz by me in the air,—shook hands with L. and T., and in a few minutes I was on my way to this town. Montarre still survives. I have heard that the ball has been extracted, but no hope is entertained of his recovery. Of course, I must arrange to leave home immediately; indeed I should have embarked already, but unhappily, the vessel for New York had sailed two hours before I arrived here. My faithful servant, who is bound to me as much by the ties of interest as those of affection, is with me. But Agnes,—how shall I leave her? Oh, if I could indulge the faintest hope that she yet loves me, or could be made to love me,—if I could see her for a single moment. But,—no, she would shrink from me now, as an outcast, and a murderer, and I could not bear it. I will not see her. I will not ask her to follow me, or say farewell, or tell her where I am to wander. I will not dare to meet the pure glance of her

eye while the blood of a fellow creature calls to me from the ground. I will go forth alone bearing the curse of an evil destiny branded upon my forehead; and she shall be happy among the friends of her childhood, while my name is linked with ignominy and reproach. Yet, she bears my name, and she must and shall bear it. I cannot give her up to another. She is mine, and she shall be mine until one common earth entomb us both. Oh, how gladly would I shatter my fevered brain with the pistol that at this moment lies before me; but that my love to Agnes binds me to life, and the few fitful gleams of happiness, that have lighted up the last year of my existence, draw me back."

* * * * *

Wallace was engaged in folding up his letter when his servant interrupted him with a hasty note from the Captain of the "Liverpool," informing him that the vessel was expected to sail within less than three days. This intimation reminded him of some necessary arrangements for his departure, which as yet he had neglected or overlooked. He went out into the bustling streets and crowded market-place; and it was not until the dusk of evening that he returned to the seclusion of his room. Exhausted in body and in mind, he threw himself upon the sofa. One of the inn waiters entered with tea, threw a hasty glance at him, and, as if insensibly appalled at his dark expression of countenance, quickly withdrew.

Perhaps the hurry of business, connected as it probably was in his case with vigorous mental effort, had partially relieved the Unbeliever's mind during the early

part of the evening; but now that he was again alone, a sense of the horror of his situation rushed upon him with increased force. For some minutes he ate and drunk mechanically, gazing stupidly at the bright metal of the tea urn, that stood upon the table before him;—every sense of taste and feeling seeming to be suspended, and the body and soul, as it were frozen together, into a state of dead paralysis.

Presently he roused himself, and paced the room in all the agony of grief. Then, turning abruptly to the window, he exclaimed, "Let me shut out the remains of day, for even the faint light of the moon sickens me!" He looked upon the hazy horizon which stretched itself above the roofs of houses and stacks of chimneys which obscured the surrounding country—but day lingered still in the mellow of an August twilight,—soft purple clouds met and embraced beneath the warm rays of the declining sun, while the moon looked on, and blessed them with her hallowed light; and two or three little stars came out and twinkled in the dusk. Wallace turned away, for it seemed to him as if Nature herself beheld and mocked him, as he lay, crushed and bleeding, beneath the jarring wheels of some tremendous power which was dragging him on to a destiny of irretrievable misery.

Poor Wallace! A little more mental suffering, or a little less physical strength, and the mind that now vibrated in the balances between desperation and hope, and yet just maintained a trembling equilibrium, would have been born down to childish imbecility; and the high spirited

and accomplished young man who but a few days, nay, —a few hours before, had dared the laws of earth and heaven, would have been carried to some neighbouring asylum a drivelling lunatic!—And what could Nature do for him now? Could he not repose in her resistless laws, and be at peace? Alas! no,—She had wounded —for Wallace was the victim of jealousy and love; but now she left him in his emergency like a cruel step-mother, forsaking the child who had trusted in her, and offering him no relief but death,—the death of a cowardly suicide, shrinking beneath the evils of life. "And I will die!" exclaimed Wallace, aloud, pressing his cold hands against his forehead as if it did him good; and yet he shuddered, as the strange resolve echoed in the large, empty room. "Yes,—I will die,—who shall hinder me?" he repeated, in a lower tone. "Before another night, yonder pale moon shall look down upon a heavy, senseless corpse; and the bright stars shall twinkle upon a set of half frightened jurymen, as they hold their coroner's inquest over me, and talk of me, and guess at my motives, and condemn me, and shake their heads over me;—and this warm, throbbing heart shall be cold,—cold,—cold as the evening mist. They may do what they like with me,—it signifies not. They may bury me in the silence of midnight, by stealth, in Clifton church-yard, without stone or monument to mark the place. I want no Christian burial,—no parson prating over me about heaven, and the resurrection of the just. I want no memorial of my miserable existence, —but Agnes loves the quiet yew that will bend over the

place where I am laid,—and her feet will tread the green grass above my head. I will see Agnes once more. She shall not know it—I will look at her, and then close my eyes in an eternal sleep."

He turned eagerly to the window, and took out his watch. He could discern by the moonlight that it was nine o'clock; and a momentary calm succeeded the tempest of his excited feelings as he began to reflect upon the best means of putting the resolution he had formed into immediate practise. One and another plan suggested itself to his mind; but before he had determined which to adopt, his faithful servant entered the room with candles. "I have just learnt that I must return to B——— to-night on important business," said the Unbeliever, addressing him, "You will remain here."

"If you start by the mail you have about half an hour, sir," said the man, quietly; for he had become of late too much accustomed to his master's caprices to feel in the smallest degree surprised by this abrupt expression of his determination.

"By the mail,—order me a coach directly;" replied Wallace, and he spoke in a tone of voice so cool and unimpassioned that the servant withdrew under the impression that the visit to B——— had been arranged and pre-meditated for hours.

* * * *

That same night, before the clock struck twelve, Wallace was at the Railway terminus at B———.

Muffled in a large, military cloak—his face partially concealed beneath a green shade—he directed his steps

to some livery stables, which he recollected to have seen at a distance of about fifty yards from the station-house. The ostler was in bed, but he easily succeeded in rousing him; and with the help of a well-filled purse, and a story about his having travelled little less than a hundred miles to visit a dying relative, secured without further difficulty the best horse in the stud. He then turned at once to the Clifton road, rode quickly over the rough pavement, and soon passed the last lamp-post that stands at the outskirts of the town,—like a worn out traveller resting himself within sight of the end of his journey.

The road between B——— and Clifton,—always dull and quiet by broad daylight—became at midnight fearfully dark and gloomy. Every village sound was hushed in the hamlets as he passed, and not one merry light twinkled in the cottage windows, telling its tale of life and comfort. Once, the stillness was broken by the distant chimes of the church clocks, as one by one they gave a single toll, which fell in the air like a dull passing bell, and died away.

Wallace was alone with Nature. He began to feel more in his own element, for dark night had settled in upon the earth; and even the faint light of the moon was half hidden amid the thick foliage of the elms and beeches, which for several miles hang in gothic arches above the road. Now and then, a jackdaw, startled by the sound of the horse's feet, fluttered from its nest, and poured its hoarse note into the ear of midnight,—like the bitter laugh of some forsaken spirit,—or perhaps a shower of mellow leaves fell rustling to the ground.

In about two hours the Unbeliever reached the village, and could discern the dark trees surrounding the Old Hall and the spire of the church, looking over the Rectory, like a pale spectre. Having crossed the bridge, he turned his horse towards the woods without the plantations, adjoining Richard Fleetwood's residence, and resolved to make his way at once, to the cottage of our friend Timothy the gamekeeper, who, as a sort of security against the attacks of "Sly Jack," and his companion, had the keys of the Hall in his own possession.

He reached the gamekeeper's lodge, and dismounted. The old man was fast asleep. Wallace knocked at the door of his hermitage, repeatedly, but receiving no answer, he flung a handful of pebbles at the upper window. In a few seconds he heard the window open, and the old man's white night cap was discernible in the darkness of the night.

"Holloa!"—exclaimed the gamekeeper, fiercely.

"Are you alone?" demanded Wallace.

"What's that to you?" replied the old man, in a loud but singularly tremulous voice, "Be hanged for an old poacher!"

"What Timothy!—Don't you know me?" exclaimed the Unbeliever, suddenly changing his tone and manner, "How dead asleep you are, come down and open the door."

"Why,! Bless my soul, sir! but surely it's none of you?"—said the old man, "Well, if I was not dreaming of you just as"—

"Come,—come down," said Wallace, in a tone half

coaxing, half impatient, "Don't keep me standing here in the cold."

The white night cap disappeared from the window; and slowly and cautiously, old Timothy fumbled down his narrow staircase, lit a farthing candle with the help of a few dying embers in the fire-place, and carefully shielding the light with one hand, unbarred the door with the other. Wallace entered, and eagerly flung back the door.

"La!—if Tib does not know you," exclaimed the gamekeeper, as his terrier dog sprang from the hearth and fawned against Wallace; at the same time he rubbed his eyes and began to stir about the cinders in the fire-place with great vehemence, muttering to himself, "Such work and such talking as there's been about you at the Hall!"

"Look here," said Wallace earnestly, "I must leave B——— again, immediately, but I want to see my wife first. You have a key by which you enter your master's house at any hour of the night. I know this from Mr. Fleetwood, himself. Get me in to-night without disturbing the family, and"—

"Mr. Arnold, there's some black, underhand work in all this coming to an old servant at little better than midnight," interrupted the man. "If you want to go into the Hall you must find your own way there."

"We shall see," returned the Unbeliever, without appearing in the least degree discomposed; "I do not ask for something for which I am able to make no return." He threw a handful of sovereigns, jingling to

the cottage hearth, as he added, "Now, don't be an old fool."

"What will master say?" exclaimed the old man, his eyes glistening at the sight of the gold.

"Master 'll know nothing about it, unless you are fool enough to tell him, simple head," said Wallace, impatiently. "Come along, and you'll be a rich man to-morrow."

Bribery succeeded,—it too seldom fails; and in a few minutes Wallace and his companion were stealing softly along the dark avenue. They reached the Hall door without interruption.

"It's fine and cold after one's warm bed," said Timothy, shivering and speaking in a suppressed tone of voice. It was the single sentence that had passed between them during their walk; and he proceeded to unlock the door, adding, in a whisper, "Hush? they are as still as mice; you can just see your way, be sharp, and I will wait here till you return."

Wallace motioned him back with his hand, and passed across the saloon. He reached the top of the staircase without disturbing the heavy sleep either of the servants or the family, most of whom had only been in bed a short time. He approached his wife's room, and opened the door. He listened,—Agnes breathed heavily as if she were asleep. He stopped for a few seconds beside the room door; for it seemed as if he was standing upon holy ground, and everything around him was rendered sacred by some blessed recollection. After a few minutes he slowly approached her bed-side.

Morning was now breaking faintly through the white window curtains; and Agnes looked pale and beautiful, as some chiselled image of repose and purity sleeping over the cold sepulchre. Wallace insensibly drew nearer, and leant over her, until his head touched and rested upon her pillow. There he lay—how long he knew not—in a strange reverie of holy associations, listening to the measured breathing of the only object on earth that he had ever loved, as if, like the harp of the son of Jesse, her influence could allay the demon of his soul. And Agnes was beside him, lying in happy unconsciousness of her misery in the forgetfulness of her first sleep—sleep pure and quiet as an infant's—save that some faint recollection of the past—some shadow of sorrow, unknown in the happy visions of infancy, flitted across the mind of Agnes, even in her dreams. A few minutes passed—and now she breathed quicker, and suddenly started. "She is waking," said Wallace, "and I will die, even by her side." He grasped the pistol, which he had carefully concealed from the gamekeeper, and deliberately pointed it at his breast. The sudden alteration in his position had partially roused her, but she was still asleep; her head drooped lower in its pillow, and she dreamily raised her left hand and let it fall upon his heart. "She is waking,"—exclaimed Wallace, but the weapon of destruction fell from his hand. The insignificant action had brought a rush of forgotten associations to his mind. It reminded him of his first meeting with Agnes, after their long separation; and that mute expression of affection to which, but a few

short months ago, she had responded with all the deep fervour of a woman's soul, when she ventured her happiness to his keeping. That evening had passed away like the vagaries of a dream, or a tale that is told,—it had been forgotten in the full tide of happiness that succeeded; but it had left an impress upon his heart which his present misery and irritation could not altogether dash out and obliterate; and now,—in the darkest hour of his life,—all the circumstances of that interview rose vividly to his recollection. "She loved me once," he said, speaking audibly, but in a subdued tone of voice, "she loved me once, though she has so soon forgotten me; and she is precious for the memory of that day,—of that hour, if it were but a single hour, when her beaming eyes looked on mine with kindness, and I felt that there was a reality in her affection:—now, she loves another, and I have stained my hand in his blood,—and she hates me,—can I yet be deceived?"

Wallace rose, for morning was now quickly advancing, and every thing in the room had become visible. He turned from the sleeping Agnes, and threw a hasty glance at the scattered pieces of furniture or dress that lay around him,—chairs,—tables,—dressing-cases,—the gorgeous pattern of the chintz window curtains,—every thing in the room seemed to him like a memento of departed pleasure. He sought for some reminiscence of Agnes which he might bear with him in his wanderings. He looked for her chain,—it was lying on her dressing-table, but it was the chain that he had given her;—and there were her books, but they were all books that he

had given her. Close by the place where he was standing, and touching the bed, there was a slight japanned work-table, upon which his wife had left her handkerchief, laid carelessly upon the opened leaves of a large bible, which she had been reading before she fell asleep. Wallace hastily withdrew the handkerchief, and placed it in his breast. In the same instant his eye fell upon the chapter which Agnes had been reading. It was the twenty-first chapter of the Apocalypse, and he could just discern in the twilight that she had marked the first four verses of it with her pencil. He read them. He did not believe them,—no, they were to him uncertain as the vagaries of Mahomet's paradise, or the dreams of a promised fairy land,—but the beautiful purity of scripture imagery in the vision of the New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride for her husband, &c., and the land where "there is no death neither sorrow nor crying," though he saw it, only as a panorama of fancied beauty and happiness, arrested his attention and perhaps touched his heart. Something,—but he knew not how it was,—something like a gleam of hope reached the darkness of his soul; and tears, but not bitter tears,—tears such as women and children shed, came to his relief. "She does not love me now,—she is dead to me," he exclaimed, suddenly rousing himself, for morning was fast advancing, and the room grew lighter and lighter every moment. "She is *dead* to me;—but love recoils not at the sight of death, but clings with drivelling fondness to the shroud and the coffin,—stays gazing down the deep, sandy grave upon mere dust and ashes, and clasps

the image of its lost object—in all its appalling coldness and insensibility—even though it fall heavily from the embrace." He stooped forward and leant over his wife once more; his lips touched her forehead, she started; and Wallace rushed eagerly to the door,—looked back for a single moment, breathing an eternal farewell, and left her.

* * * * *

The sun had risen, over the heavy mass of B———'s roofs and chimneys, when Wallace arrived again at his hotel. He immediately retired to the seclusion of his own room; and as the first blush of early sunlight, fell fitfully through the crevices of the slight window shutters, he opened the window and breathed the fresh morning air. Light had again broken upon the earth, but the streaks of crimson dawn were not yet melted off into the vast expanse of clear blue sky. Wallace looked up, and while Nature herself seemed to upbraid him with cowardice he sank down abashed, not before the God of heaven, for he knew him not, but before the chidings and accusations of his own conscience—that unseen witness of the tumult of his soul, whose voice, even the turbulence of depraved passion had not utterly stifled. At once, his mind revolted at the idea of self-destruction. Life appeared bearable for the memory of the past. Some faint hope for the future animated him; and after taking a final leave of the little town of B——— he returned to ————, and embarked the following evening, on board the "Liverpool," for New York.

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Wallace passed several tedious days and nights on board the "Liverpool," taking little or no notice of his fellow passengers, who themselves shunned and avoided him; for something either in our wanderer's manner or appearance seemed to repel every attempt at anything like friendly intercourse, and led his companions, without an exception, and as if instinctively, to keep their distance.

Thus, time passed; and the gloomy traveller paced the deck alone, or returned to his berth and cabin, unobserved and uncared for, except by his faithful servant, who, to do the man justice, was really much attached to his master.

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Life on ship-board—with its blue expanse around us, when the sun shines above, and the ocean beneath sleeps softly as a cradled infant—is certainly not a little monotonous to an active mind. Few, however, would wish this sameness to be interrupted by the grandeur of the storm,—the roaring of the waves, the creaking, jerking, heaving and tumbling motion of the vessel, as she rises and falls; or the vivid glare of the lightning, piercing the blackness of midnight only to shed a momentary lustre over its own work of destruction. But Wallace had been at sea, and had witnessed storms at sea; and yet, as he walked to and fro upon the deck, and heard his companions congratulating each other upon the fair, calm sailing weather, he cursed the beautiful tranquillity of nature, because it harmonised so ill with the restless-

less of his own soul, and invited the vengeance of Heaven, fearing that some angel, not of mercy, but of destruction, might be sent down to trouble the waters; and longing for anything that might call forth the energies of his mind, and divert his attention from the one absorbing subject which filled his thoughts.

But Heaven, in mercy, heard him not. Still, the sun shone brightly, the winds were propitious, and the graceful vessel moved on and on, over the vast Atlantic, as safely as on the bosom of a calm, blue lake.

Their voyage was short. In less than three weeks they were in sight of land; and amid the glee and bustle among his fellow passengers, the Unbeliever alone stood unmoved. It was a calm, fine night; and the moon ever and anon hid her pale face behind a hazy cloud, and then again threw a halo of silver light upon the sea. Wallace thought of his country,—of his home,—of Agnes. Once more better feelings were awakened within him, but he yielded not to their influence. Shall I write to her? he asked himself, as he sat alone in his hotel or coffee-house in New York, after he had landed. "Shall I remind her of our early intimacy, and attempt to regain her affection?—But he did not write to Agnes. He rather sought to drown reflection in a busy whirl of pleasure; and after spending a few weeks in New York, he passed the two following months in travelling,—hurrying from one place to another, and accustoming himself daily to fresh scenes and fresh faces. He afterwards returned to the continent of Europe, and we will take leave of him again at Paris, where he spent the following winter.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not our goal:
'Dust thou art—to dust returnest'
Is not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end and way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us further than to day.

A FEW months after the duel, and the disappearance of the Unbeliever, Richard Fleetwood with his family, decided upon spending the winter in London. Arrangements were forthwith entered upon. A house was taken at Chelsea, and the Old Hall was committed to the care of Timothy, the game-keeper; and amid the desolation of Autumn, soon looked more like an enchanted castle of the olden time than an English villa of the nineteenth century.

Agnes had half consented to accompany her brother to the metropolis, but Mrs. Smith, whose kind feelings never evaporated in mere expressions of sympathy and affection, entreated her to remain with her, and make the Clifton Rectory her home until something further should transpire respecting the fate of Arnold. Agnes gratefully assented to her proposal, but Mr. and Mrs. Fleetwood were at first inclined to demur a little. Their sister's health was in a very precarious state; and change of air and scene had been recommended by our Clifton

Surgeon, as the best restorative that he could suggest.

Agnes consulted with Mr. Smith; and although, when the Rector looked upon her pale face and dull heavy eyes, and heard the languid tones of her voice, he could hardly persuade himself but that the sickness of the soul was quickly bearing the feeble body to the grave, he was very reluctant to yield to the surgeon's wishes. He knew that although Agnes was ill, the root of her disease lay far beneath the reach of medical attention and advice; and that travelling, with all its attendant dissipation, together with the busy gaiety of Mr. and Mrs. Fleetwood's circle, would only tend to increase her restlessness and depression of spirit.

"My dear Agnes," he would sometimes say, "I know that you are not a child, or an imbecile, to be hurried into forgetfulness by rapid stages. I know that as once you had an unruffled depth of happiness within your own heart, on which the fair field of nature around you was only imaged faintly, and as upon the surface; so now, independant of all around you, a tide of misery has risen up in your soul, the depth of which is known hardly to yourself, and which the feverish excitement of society will only deaden and stagnate. You are no longer capable of finding happiness in fluttering about in the sunshine, like a giddy insect. You have known something of the reality of life, and you must learn to find happiness in a greater reality."

Agnes understood him; and she felt that he could understand her. It is a satisfaction, although a gloomy one, to find that we are not singular in our feelings,—

that there are those amongst us, who—though they may not tell us how, or when—have struggled through waves of sorrow just as dark and cold as those that threaten to overwhelm us. Agnes's heart soon turned towards the Rectory as to a home of sympathy and affection,—an ark of rest amid a whole deluge of affliction.

The Fleetwood family left Clifton, early in October; and on the same day Mrs. Arnold took leave of her own room, at the Hall, and entered the Rectory. After bidding her brother and sister an affectionate farewell, she walked down alone to the river's side,—the same blue river by whose bank she and Wallace had so often wandered together in the Spring, in their own happy dream of love. Now, the surrounding woods were mellow in the shades of Autumn; but the careless stream danced merrily along as it did then, and as it had done for centuries, and poured its murmuring undersong into the silence of evening;—for it was evening, and a calm, placid, heavenly evening it was,—the setting sun, as it sank beneath a mass of purple clouds, seemed as if looking back with regret upon the beautiful woods and hills, and pouring over them a halo of parting benediction.

Agnes lingered until slowly but surely the dim twilight came stealing over the earth,—a few twinkling stars looked forth from the horizon,—the surrounding cornfields were enveloped in a dull white mist, while the moon grew brighter as night blackened in upon her. Presently a labourer passed, touching his hat as he brushed by Agnes. She enquired of him if it were late.

"None so late, ma'am," was the answer, "Nights

will be getting long now, for Autumn is coming thick upon us."

"Autumn is coming upon us," repeated Agnes, as she slowly followed the man towards the village, "Night approaches and the heavy dews of evening have entered into my soul." She proceeded to the Rectory, where Mrs. Smith and the children were impatiently waiting for her; and if a warm welcome, and the sight of smiling faces around her could have dissipated the gloom that rested upon her mind, Agnes might have been happy, but her own heart knew and felt its bitterness.

The first evening passed; and the next morning the glad sunshine, again

"Came in spite of sorrow,"

"And at the window bade good-morrow."

It was harvest time, and every one in Clifton, with only a few exceptions, were in the fields. The little Smiths played among the stubble in the gladness of their young hearts, and in the course of the morning Agnes and Mr. Smith joined them, and talked over the events of the summer.

"My dear Mr. Smith," said Agnes, taking his arm, and evidently making a strong effort to command her voice, "I scarcely dare tell my feelings even to you, this morning,—I am so unhappy—so wretchedly unhappy, that the merriment of the children, the gay laugh from the harvest field, and even the beautiful light of day, the singing of the birds and this clear warm sunshine oppress me. I feel as if this world of love and beauty were not my own element, and I long to bury my-

self in darkness, in solitude; for it seems as if cold, cold sorrow had frozen my very heart's blood,—I had watched the last sun of hope set in its own misty twilight,—and now, my whole life were one long, long Lapland night."

"Winter is here, then," said Smith, "and Spring cannot be far off."

"Spring does return for others, but not for me," said Agnes. "Nothing can now restore my withered affections to their proper tone; and yet, how all nature around me seems to beat and throb with overflowing happiness. Others have 'bread enough and to spare, while I perish with hunger.' Oh for quiet sleep and unbroken dreams,—the tranquil repose of spirit which I have so often enjoyed as a common thing, when I lay down upon my pillow with the calm trust of a child, and awoke again in the night, when no feverish recollections of sorrow haunted me, but the darkness encircled me like a guardian angel, and the midnight stillness, was to me, the voice of peace; and then, the returning sun looked in the morning through the trees around my window, and threw its chequered shade upon my bed, and every thing seemed full of blessing. Now, I sleep,—but my heart waketh,—waketh not in the consciousness of happiness, but the dark form of sorrow throws its shadow even over my dreams, and startles me into watchfulness."

"Agnes, look up," interrupted Smith, in a cheerful tone of voice, "the earth is still beautiful, and Heaven is love."

Agnes tried to reply, but she could not utter a syllable.

"Agnes, my dear Agnes," added Smith, after a pause, "listen to me. Do you think that there is no God in heaven that you should be suffered to go on bleeding to death, for the faults or mistakes of others? Did you and I come into this world to be the sport and tenis ball of chance or destiny;—to be driven to and fro like a broken leaf, according to the blindness and caprice of fortune?"

"It just seems so," said Agnes, mournfully.

"It does seem so," replied Smith. "But remember, while in this world we are all of us in a state of moral discipline and probation; and life in its reality is in obscurity to us, while life in its semblance is open and palpable to us. We enjoy and suffer,—and we, in our blindness, have learnt to look upon suffering as the shadow of death; but may it not be rather the awakening of invigorated life?—and like as, when the body returns to the dust from whence it came, the soul is designed to rise to life and immortality,—so every thing that seems to paralyse and crush us,—every deathlike sorrow, that closes the heart in its sepulchre of heaviness, may be only the precursor of some fresh resurrection of life and joy."

"It does not seem so,"—

"No,—if it did seem so, it would be an object of sight,—there would be no mystery about it. When there is no death there can be no resurrection."

* * * * * * * *

Meanwhile, life is short,—very short; and we must

not desire to flee into the wilderness or make our escape from the windy storm and tempest before that appointed time that is fixed for us. Bear your weight of sorrow,—when you can do nothing more; bear it. This event did not happen by chance,—it forms another link in the chain of Heaven's designs repecting you. Your delicate susceptibility of feeling and depth of affection,—all the peculiarities of your mental constitution, which add so much to the weight of your disappointments in life, were formed in you by the Supreme Creator. Think of his attributes,—mercy,—pity,—kindness; think of his name,—God is love; think of the relation in which he stands to you;—and although his way is in the sea, and his path in the deep waters, and he hath covered himself with a thick cloud,—trust in him. Amid the perplexing dispensations of Providence confide with your whole heart in his purposes of unchanging love."

"I do—I will," replied Agnes, earnestly. She paused a moment, and then added, mournfully,

"'But, Ah, my breast is human still,'
My affections are without home"—

"But stay, Agnes," interrupted Smith, "Where should be the home of charity or love? Not where there is human sympathy, but where there is human suffering; and is there no misery left for you to alleviate?—no wrong which you can redress?—no sorrow that you can subdue, in a world of death like ours?—Look around you, and see if there be no worn-out sufferer, drooping under a weight of ills heavier than your own; one, whose spirit is already bruised and crushed with repeated dis-

appointment and vexation, who can find no refuge on earth or in heaven, but who says, in the morning, 'would that it were evening,' and in the evening, 'would that it were morning.' Ah—when you were in the full sunshine of your own enjoyment,—when every pulse was throbbing with gladness, as you have driven rapidly past one of our hospitals or infirmaries, have you not glanced for a moment at some pale, sickly face and emaciated form, at one of the windows, aud turned away with an inward shrinking of disgust?"

"Not quite," replied Agnes, "I have thanked heaven for my own happiness, and only wished that I could share it with my brothers and sisters.—Oh, the past,—the past!"—

"Turn your attention from yourself, at present," said Smith, "and find a home for your sympathy in the wants and sufferings of others. It is worth living for to administer the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;—to speak words of consolation and peace in the ear of him who has been cradled in unkindness and oppression, who has buffeted with the storms of life, unfriended and alone; and now dies, helpless and uncared for, in some obscure garret, with none to watch his faltering breath, or count the throbbing of his last pulse, or close his weary eyes in their long sleep. Oh Agnes, think how much there is for us to do; and how short may be the time allotted to us. How uncertain, how dark and flickering appears the light of earthly happiness, however pure it may have been, when viewed in the clear sunshine of eternity!

Oh yes, I can understand it all—you were very, very happy; 'imparadised' within each others affections; thinking, living, hoping as for each other; and everything around you was encircled with a glory; and life was passing away like a beautiful fairy tale; but disappointment, like death, threw its gloomy shadow upon your path, and you awoke, and it had vanished as a dream. Be it so,—it is well. Forget the past, and you shall yet find that it has left its image upon your heart; you are not enfeebled by it, but rather nerved and animated for fresh conflicts. Life is not the season for *enjoyment* but *exertion*.

* * * * *

Be content for the present to see through a glass, and darkly,—to know but in part. What wonder is it that, with our finite notions and faculties for comprehension, we are unable to understand Him who is infinite in knowledge and power. We are so blind, so stupid, that we are often led to interpret our little disappointments and vexations in life, as signs of God's impotency; and when the cloudy day comes, instead of trusting Him, we are ready to conclude that He has faltered in his purposes of kindness concerning us. A feeling of gloomy distrust comes over us; and we begin to think,—although perhaps reverence forbids us to acknowledge the sentiment even to our own hearts,—we begin to feel as if evil were stronger than good, and were permitted to prevail against us."

* * * *

"Thank you," said Agnes, as soon as the Rector had made a pause, "I will try to act in accordance with

your principles." She remained with the children, and Smith returned to his own library, and told Mrs. Smith that he was going to make a sermon.

But, alas for the Rector of Clifton!—Soon, with deplorable perversity of taste and feeling, he turned his attention from theology to poetry, and instead of a sermon, he wrote a hymn; a few verses of which we will transcribe.

"God created all to bless,
Trust with Him thy happiness;
Courage! brighter days will come,
Earth is not the Christian's home.

Though no gleam of day appears,
Not a star thy darkness cheers,
No faint streak of welcome light,
Break the shadows of thy night;

But around and o'er thy head,
Every thing is cold and dead,
As if forgotten and unknown,
Thou strugglest with the world alone.

Yet on God, thy life, thy way,
Let thine orphaned spirit stay.
Cease contending—Who art thou?
Be at peace—What can'st thou do?

Who in thickest darkness reigns,
He thy weary life sustains;
God sees through the darkest night,
God is love and God is light.

On his changeless love rely,
Time and earth and hell defy;
Till awak'ning from the tomb,
Heaven's own light disperse thy gloom."

And now, with your permission, we shall leave Agnes to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and for lack of incidents, adventures, or something more *piquant* or romantic than their life at Clifton Rectory, we shall take a liberty with old father Time, which is wisely forbidden except in story books, leap the bounds of several distinct seasons, and relate what happened to the Unbeliever, on his return to the continent, about ten calendar months after he had left his wife and country.

CHAPTER XV.

"But the sorrow of the world worketh death."

SOME of us may have seen a young man following heedlessly the bent of his corrupt passions, until he is, as it were, borne headlong downward by their impetuosity. He may have been warned of the consequences of his course; and reminded that, although "he walk in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes," the end of these things is death. We may have appealed to his affection, or to his better judgment; and in the name of religion, and truth, and reason, attempted to exorcise the unclean spirit, and command that he should come out of him, and enter no more into him: and what has been the result? The deluded votary of voluptuousness and pleasure has listened, and is persuaded. He knows that sure as death and the grave, is the fatal termination of his path; and perhaps, for a little while, he turns from his vain pursuits, and wanders about in dissatisfaction and vexation of spirit, seeking rest and finding none. But his heart is still cleaving fast to his degrading gratifications; the relish, the keen appetite for unhallowed enjoyment is undiminished; and soon again he is turned aside, rushes backward with increased eagerness, and despite the thunders of heaven, or the accusa-

tions of a half enlightened conscience, he opens his heart to the reception of every vile and hateful feeling; like the seven devils they come and dwell there, and "his last state is worse than his first."

Then, we may have seen him again. The way of unholy pleasure is swifter than a weaver's shuttle; and the interval between our first and second interview with him, has perhaps been very brief. Death has now marked him for his own,—he is stretched upon a bed of sickness, and the sunk eyes, and hollow cheeks, and shrunk emaciated form, tell us that he is in the firm grasp of him from whose cold embrace there is no escape. For a little while he clings tenaciously to life, and trifles, with the few remaining sands that are in his glass; but soon the stern realities of an unknown state of existence stare him in the face. Oh, if it were but a dream, and he could return again to the freshness of the morning,—to his schoolboy days, when his young heart glowed with life and expectation, and he knelt in the bloom of rosy health to receive his mother's blessing; —or to youth's first dawn, when in the anticipation of his ardent mind, this world of love and beauty seemed created all for him; and he drunk in happiness as the breath of spring. But the past has faded like the vague images of a dream, and who shall recall it?—As it is appointed unto man, "once to *die*," so—as far as this mortal life is concerned—it is appointed unto man, once to *live*. Happy is he who, "using this world, does not abuse it, but remembers that the fashion of it passeth away." But it is time that we return to our story.

It was now more than twelve long months since that blithe May morning when Wallace Arnold led his little Agnes from the altar, and called her by his own name. The ceremony had not been to him an unmeaning one: he loved Agnes with his whole heart, and when before God and man, he had vowed to cherish and protect her until death, he meant all that he had said; he was ready to dedicate his whole life to her happiness.

His marriage with Agnes was not a comparatively, unpremeditated act. It had been for years, the favorite object of his schemes and wishes; and now that he had, after repeated disappointment, at last succeeded in claiming her as his own property, he had ventured to look forward to a long life of uninterrupted prosperity,—to a home of domestic happiness,—to children—sons in whom his own character might be immortalised and gain increased strength; and daughters—fair and gentle as Agnes.

But he had fled from that home while as yet it hardly existed, but as a creation of his own fancy. Unbelief,—"an evil heart of unbelief," while it incapacitated him for its enjoyment had driven him from its shelter; and words, a few careless words, coming to him like a poisoned arrow, had sunk deep into his suspecting nature, and rankled there, until, in the delirium of his excited feelings, he committed the act which turned the whole course of his future life.

From that hour the fair visions of youth and of manhood faded from his mind. He believed that he had lost Agnes, and with her that he had lost all; and so miser-

ably was he blinded and duped, by the evil counsels of his fallen spirit, that after the first gush of sorrow had subsided, he never wished to look again upon the idol of his early thoughts and wishes, or hoped to recover his wife's affections, but turned with loathing from the most endearing associations of his past life. He believed that Agnes had forgotten him, and he sought only to forget her. "If"—he would sometimes say to himself —"I have regarded her with unjust suspicion, I have rendered myself unworthy of her; she hates me, and I deserve it; but if otherwise, I feel that I can now hate her." Yes,—and he thought he did hate her; and reproaching himself for the misplaced affection of by-gone years, he tried to look upon his connection with Agnes as a visionary romance,—an idle dream of hope and love, —a mere illusion,—something which his ardent imagination had invested with a halo of unreal light and beauty: and when he sat alone at the Hotel du Prince, at Paris, he would even laugh aloud—a bitter, forsaken laugh it was—when he thought, for a moment, of his once cherished fondness for his wife, and the agony of his separation.

Rich, young, gifted; it is not surprising that Wallace for a while made his way in society, and his acquaintance was much courted in that circle, where the bent of his taste led him, and where his peculiar circumstances were unknown. Here, at the first, he attempted to stifle reflection, and obtain happiness in a perpetual whirl of gaiety and amusement. He loved not—he had never loved but once—but he was

deep in the artifices of love. He was busy in the mysteries of coquetry and intrigue; but yet the memory of the past, like a fearful apparition, haunted his steps. Like the fugitive Cain, it seemed as if the power above had branded him with some visible sign of his disapprobation. His expressive countenance became daily more dark and forbidding; while his conversation was characterised by a vein of bitterness and satire which ill accorded with the sprightly humour of his Parisian associates. Offended by his moroseness, or repulsed by his misanthropic temperament, his new acquaintances one by one dropped off; and our Unbeliever was again unknown and forgotten.

He felt that he was alone in the world,—he had no longer hope or interest in life. He had been seeking satisfaction in the acquisition of pleasure; but he had as yet, merely floated as on the surface of dissipation. He now sunk deep—deep—deep—how deep we know not,—grasped pleasure in every form, with greedy feverish craving, until nature was exhausted; and the late athletic young man lay upon his couch a poor, weak, emaciated invalid. He was then at Marseilles, having resorted to the South for change of air. He applied at once for medical advice, but was soon alarmingly worse; and after he had consulted two or three French physicians of acknowledged celebrity, without obtaining any relief, under the influence of strong English prejudice, he declined their further attendance, and determined to place himself under the professional treatment of a fellow countryman,—a surgeon who had but lately arrived in

the neighbourhood, and whose name had been mentioned to him by his servant.

That surgeon was no other than our friend Israel Nehemiah. Wallace sent for him, of course, under the name which he had assumed; and in a somewhat lengthy epistle, explained the nature of his symptoms. In reply, he learnt by a brief, verbal message, that Mr. Nehemiah only practised gratuitously, among his friends, &c.; he would, however, be happy to call upon him as soon as he was disengaged.

He called the same morning. Wallace received him with grateful satisfaction; and after a few introductory enquiries, conjured him to tell him, at once, the real state of his case. With a strange, dreamy feeling of bewildered hope and fear, he heard his new attendant confirm the unfavorable opinion which had been expressed by his other physicians. In conclusion, Mr. Nehemiah said something intimating a hope that he might recover.

"You think so?" said Wallace, quickly, and with a faint smile indicative of incredulity.

The surgeon looked him full in the face, and said, simply, "Yes."

"As one of your patients, perhaps you do not object to deceive me?" said the Unbeliever.

"I am but a man," replied Nehemiah, quietly, "God only knows the number of our days; but with respect to my opinion, my yea, is yea."

Wallace smiled rather contemptuously, but quickly checking himself, he thanked Nehemiah for his attention;

and observed carelessly, that, "death must come some time both to man and brute."

The Quaker had risen to withdraw, but he resumed his seat, and remained for some minutes, silently contemplating his patient's gloomy expression of countenance. "I will send the bottle which I mentioned to thee," he said at length, "and if I can do anything further to help thee"—

Wallace started: he felt at the moment as if his quiet countryman had read all that was in his heart. "No," he interrupted, quickly, "I am not insensible to your kindness—but—I do not require—you can do nothing to help me."

"Then, may God help thee!" said Nehemiah, earnestly.

"What," said Wallace, wishing to draw his surgeon's attention from himself to his principles,—"what if there be no God?"

"There is a God," said Nehemiah, "and he hath been our help from one generation to another. 'Acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace.' Good-night,—I will look in again in the evening;" and without waiting for his patient's reply, he abruptly withdrew.

Wallace threw himself again upon his couch. "Here I lie," he said to himself, speaking in the bitterness of his soul, "destined to hopeless misery. I am wearied of the monotony of life—I court death and the grave; and yet, like a subtle tormentor, he keeps me at bay, though he is ever staring me in the face;—heavy—heavy—heavy—it seems as if the pleasures of the past fastened

themselves like a drag upon my spirit. My life has been short and gloomy, as a November day; and it is already night, and I must die—death—sleep—annihilation—what is it?"

He rose up, and left the room for some hours. When he returned, he, for the first time, perceived that Nehemiah had left a copy of an English Newspaper, lying on the chair which he had occupied. He took it into his hand. It was an old paper, dated January, 18—. He was about to lay it down again, but glancing carelessly at the side that happened to be uppermost, his eye fell upon a singular paragraph, inserted amongst the advertisements. It was expressed in terms which he knew, at once, could only be intelligible to himself, and signed—*Agnes*. He read it. A strange sensation of mingled pain and pleasure thrilled through his heart. Could it be even so?—he had doubted, injured, forsaken her;—yet she was unwilling to distrust him, and her heart like a fond parasite clung to his memory. She was ill—time had elapsed since the insertion of the paragraph—it might be that she was dead.

"There are moments in life, when past events, like winged shuttles, dart to and fro before us, and by their incessant movements, leave a web, which we ourselves, in a greater or less degree, have spun and put upon the loom."

Wallace was alone. Although faint and exhausted, he paced the room for some minutes, attempting to tranquillise his feelings. He tried to forget—he tried to look forward—he tried to realise the present; but visions

of the past crowded before his imagination, in quick succession, filling him with remorse and horror. He saw the murdered Montarre, bleeding and faint, rise up against him like a fearful apparition, in the ghastly image of death; and heard the dying curse from the lips of his once venerated friend, Dr. Fleetwood; and beheld his own beautiful Agnes, pale and sorrowful, fading like a flower that had been gathered from the parent stem, and cast away in neglect!—At once, his own heart, with the violence of a tumultuous citadel, rose against him in mutiny. A clamor of tongues within him were vociferous in their accusations; and in the struggle of feeling that succeeded, he cursed heaven, and earth, and hell, and his own soul.

He was leaning against the wall of the room,—his hand firmly grasping the Newspaper,—his thoughts so much absorbed that he had not perceived the entrance of a stranger, when he was again accosted by the calm, friendly voice of Nehemiah. "I am sorry to disturb thee, but I have left a paper here."

"Tell me," said Wallace, earnestly, his wild dark eyes assuming an expression of desperation, "Is there really any hope that I may soon die, otherwise than as a cowardly suicide? Would that I had died before to-night!"

"What does thee say, friend?" replied Nehemiah, looking at him without moving a muscle of his countenance: "I hoped that I had not heard thee rightly. Thou art but young, and are thy accounts already so clear, both with God and man, that thou hast nothing to

do but to die? Hast thou so soon done thy work?"

"Aye,—already; and it has been a work of destruction," said Wallace.

Nehemiah went on as though he had not heard him. "Time moves surely if slowly; and thy three-score years and ten will soon pass away. It is strange that thou art so soon wearied with the greatness of the way, and sickened with God's holy gift of life. An Englishman! and is not thy country dear to thee?—Think of thy home;—hast thou no dear ones there who will hang over thy early grave and weep for the lost?"

"No," said Wallace, faintly; his eye fell once more upon the paper,—he turned away his head;—he had never shed a tear since he had left his native shore, how could he weep to-night?

"Tell me the story of thy few and evil days," said Nehemiah, kindly,—and oh, it seemed long since Wallace had heard the voice of kindness,—"How is it that thou hast neither home nor kindred nor country, but like forsaken Israel, nothing 'but a grave?'"

"Nehemiah?" said Wallace, earnestly, "Do you know Agnes Arnold?"

The Quaker started from his seat; quick as lightning the truth flashed upon his mind, and he exclaimed, "I do—I know all—and thou art Wallace Arnold!"

"If I have wronged her," said Wallace, in a tone of voice half choked with intense emotion, "tell me, tell me, that I may see her yet before I die."

Unable to determine at once as to the best way of proceeding, or yielding to an impulse of his deliberative

nature, Nehemiah hesitated. "Nay," said he, after a pause, "I am not sure that I feel free to tell thee, to-day."

Wallace sprang from the couch upon which he had again reclined, and throwing himself at his feet, conjured him by all that he held sacred, to relate what he knew of Agnes.

"And so, this is thy first enquiry after thy poor forsaken one," said Nehemiah, with his characteristic calmness.

"She loved me not," murmured Wallace.

"How does thee know?" was the provoking interrogation. "She said that she was thine—she had vowed before God's altar to love thee, and none but thee, until death; wherefore could'st thou doubt but that her yea, was yea, and her nay, nay?"

"She deceived me," said Wallace, bitterly, "and 'cursed be the deceiver.'"

"Nay, friend, but *cursed be the Unbeliever*," said Nehemiah, in a tone of reproach that sunk deep into his heart; "the man who is going down,—aye, even to the grave, having neither faith in God or man!—Oh Wallace Arnold, Wallace Arnold, thine own heart is the deceiver; and thou hast mingled the bitter in thy cup of life and drunk to thine own condemnation. Poor miserable Unbeliever! rightly art thou classed in Scripture with him 'that loveth and maketh a lie;' thou sayest, 'all men are liars, but thou knowest not that there is a lie in thy right hand.' From distrusting God thou hast learnt to distrust his creatures; the light of Heaven's truth is veiled from thy dark heart; and now, truth

in man is become to thee a mockery and a delusion."

"Truth! what do you mean by truth?" interrupted Wallace, "and where is it?"

"Nay, ask not, grovelling one," said Nehemiah, "but wait, if haply the scales of unbelief may fall from thine eyes;—ask not,—wonder not, while thou art groping about in thy darkness, and although in the midst of God's holy sunshine, cannot tell but that every thing above thee, and around thee, and within thee, is a lie! Truth is in heaven, but it may tabernacle here on earth; —its dwelling is in the pavilion of the Eternal, but yet its going forth is from the end of the heaven, and its circuit unto the ends of it, neither need there be any hid from the heat thereof;—it has been nigh thee, it has 'beset thee behind and before, and been about thy bed and about thy path;'—how is it that it has never entered into thine heart?

Go to, now, and learn that there is truth both in God and man. Trust the testimony of his beautiful creation —trust the testimony of thine own conscience—trust the testimony of thy fellow creatures—and then, fall back upon the witness of that mysterious Being, who, from the brightness of the Father's glory, assumed a nature like our own, and came down amongst us, to reveal himself, 'the way, the truth, and the life.' And now, all that I know of thy Agnes may be summed up in a few words. After thy departure Adolphe Montarre drunk poison, in a moment of delirium; and thus died at last, as by his own hand. It was a relief to thy wife to know that a brother's blood did not call to thee from

the ground. She found a home in the quiet Rectory, and tried to rouse herself to exertion for the welfare of others; but sorrow had well nigh broken her heart."

Wallace covered his face with his hands; and Nehemiah, after hesitating a moment, went on. "She sunk day by day,—this is the last intelligence that I have received,—haply she is now fallen asleep,—but Oh my brother—my fallen brother, do not despair. Believe me, there is a Resurrection in reserve for them that look for it—there is a life of re-union and immortality; and let us be what we may, Hope is still encircling us, as the beautiful rainbow spreads out its arms and embraces the earth. Though she should be dead"—

"Stop—Mercy—mercy—mercy," exclaimed Wallace, sinking prostrate to the ground. "Can I have dedicated myself to her happiness and left her in helpless misery like my own—left her to wither and die alone and forgotten!—It is more than I can bear—and there is no help—no refuge for my wounded spirit, though it is crushed and weighed down as with a whole universe of sin and misery!—My heart is breaking with its own struggles—Help,—help!—if there be power above or beneath. Heaven of my childhood! God of my infant trust! I invoke thee, though my soul mocks at her incantations. Cold, dreary death, why hide thy grisly face from one who is crying for thee as a rescue?—help—help—but, no,—there is no help;—heaven's black canopy is sealed in silence, its very starlight pierces me to the soul. There is no comforter—Comforter, what have I to do with comfort?—the word sickens me"—

"Peace, peace," said Nehemiah, almost appalled at the storm which he had been the means of raising, and fearing lest the unhappy invalid should lose his reason. "God is love,—his whole universe is full of love, even at this moment he is encompassing us with his love. God who made all things, 'hateth nothing that he has made.' Rouse thyself,—look up; for know assuredly, that there is power both above and beneath. The Father of thy childish trust is thy comforter, but thine unbelief has darkened the canopy of heaven, and covered him with a thick cloud that thy prayer should not pass through. Open thine eyes, and from this hour resolve to woo the truth of God with thy whole soul; and believe me, it shall become to thee love and beauty and a home. Read thy Bible; and may that Divine Spirit who, when he moved over the troubled waters in the first creation, said, 'Let there be light and there was light,' shine upon the darkness of thine heart, aud behold all things shall become new. Farewell, I will look in early in the morning."

Nehemiah left him, and Wallace was again alone. The tempest of his soul had subsided, and he retired to his own room; he extinguished the lamp and drew aside the window curtains. It was a clear starlight night—so quiet that scarcely a blade of grass moved, or a single leaf rustled in the air,—it seemed as if the stillness of nature had sunk deep into his heart,—he looked upon the dark vault of heaven, with its countless worlds, and in the same instant, his eye fell upon the mirror on the dressing-table; he turned to it instinctively, and shud-

dered at the sight of his own image—so pale, so changed that it seemed in the dull silence of night, like a ghastly apparition—he turned away with horror and disgust. A few hours before he had courted Death as an eternal sleep, but now, he turned from its approach, as from an enemy, and felt that it was a curse. He sunk down, and buried his face in his hands; and although he uttered not the faintest whisper, for the first time in his life since the days of his infancy, he prayed; his soul yearned for life and immortality—for a hope beyond death—a resurrection from the ruin of the grave.

* * * *

"To-morrow—to-morrow," said Wallace, as he lay restless upon his bed that night, "I will go and seek Agnes;" and then he fell asleep, and while strange dreams, and visions of darkness, floated before his imagination, he beheld her image in every thing—sometimes fair and beautiful, as he had seen her in her gay bridal dress; but often pale and cold,—wrapped in grave clothes, as if prepared for the sepulchre.

Before morning dawned he had given directions to his servant to have all things in readiness for his return to England; and when Nehemiah came in to pay his first visit, he found his feeble patient prepared for a journey.

"How is this, friend?" said the surgeon, while his countenance did not betray the slightest symptom of surprise.

"I am going to my own home," replied the Unbeliever, pronouncing the words with an accent of deep feeling. "I will go and see Agnes before I die, or lay

in the same grave, that my ashes may be mingled with hers."

Aware of the hazardous nature of the undertaking, in Arnold's present state of health, Nehemiah attempted to dissuade him from it; but the Unbeliever was resolute, he would return to England, at whatever risk, and he would return immediately. Nehemiah therefore said no more against it; but, although at some sacrifice of personal feeling, he yielded at length to the earnest wish expressed by Wallace that he himself should accompany him. Wallace determined to travel in his own carriage, and it was agreed that they should attempt to accomplish the journey by short stages, and proceed at once to Boulogne. Nehemiah wrote by the next post to apprise Mr. Smith of the circumstances of his acquaintance with Wallace, and enquire after Agnes.

They set out the same evening; but before they had passed the first ten miles, the Unbeliever became so much exhausted as to render it necessary for him to rest for some days in a remote village, where he was fortunate enough to meet with good accommodation. Nehemiah remained with him, and employed himself in attending to the wants of the poor people in the neighbourhood.

From the evening of their first interview he had conversed but little with his companion. Nehemiah was not a man to obtrude his sentiments upon another; neither was he, by any means, of a communicative cast of mind. He seemed, like Israel of old time, "to dwell alone;" his life was comparitively an isolated one, except

as he lived in the hearts and sympathies of those whom his kindness had relieved; and it was not until,—either wearied with the counsel of his own spirit, or attracted by the singular bearing of the silent man who seemed, nevertheless, to carry in his own bosom the elements of love and peace,—that Wallace put to him a direct question, that he made the most distant allusion to his religious opinions. "Friend," he answered, "I am a Christian. I have examined the evidences of Christianity, and although I acknowledge that there are difficulties enough connected with the subject to bewilder the minds of those who chose rather to believe a lie, I am satisfied that to him who is willing to seek for Him, God hath not left Himself without witness. He deals with man as He has taught us to deal with each other; and as in our intercourse with our fellow creatures, we are to let our' yea be yea,' and our 'nay be nay; for whatsoever is more cometh of evil,' so with *Him:* we are not to be captious but simple and trusting; we are to rely upon the *Yea* of the Eternal. The demand for an unnecessary amount of evidence, before we will yield to conviction, cometh from a heart of suspicion and unbelief.

Read thy Bible, Wallace Arnold, for verily, 'the truth itself is its own witness;' and 'The enquiry of truth which is the love-making or wooing of it, and the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.' For myself, I see so much of holiness and beauty, in the religion of the New Tes-

tament, that did I not acknowledge Jesus of Nazereth as my Lord and my God, I would yet fall down and worship him as the incarnation of Goodness and Truth—the only perfect work of Nature."

* * * * *

CHAPTER XVI.

"I have penetrated the clouds, I have risen above the sun, and there is no God there. I have descended to the uttermost bounds of creation, I have looked into the abyss, and have called out, Father, where art thou? But I heard only the rain which was falling drop by drop into the abyss; and the eternal tempest, which is guided by no order, alone answered me. Then I raised my eyes to the vault of heaven and found there nothing but dark empty infinite space. Eternity rested upon chaos and was gnawing itself."

It was not long before Nehemiah received a note from Mr. Smith, from which we will subtract a few sentences;—

* * * *

"I have not yet ventured to acquaint Mrs. Arnold with the particulars contained in your letter—so weak are we in this mortal life, that not only our sorrows, but the sunshine of our joy may consume us—and Agnes's health is yet exceedingly delicate. Tell Mr. Arnold to return to us immediately—that his wife lives, and he is not forgotten;—and let us hear by return of post that he is better, as I trust he is; we shall be anxious until you write again; for as Fanny is just saying to me, we all love Mr. Arnold for the sake of Agnes."—

* * * *

Nehemiah read the letter aloud, but before he had proceeded far, the agitation of Wallace became so intense that his quiet surgeon thought it best to replace it in his desk.

The affection of the Unbeliever's ardent nature was roused by Smith's allusion to his wife, but every recollection of her was embittered by self reproach; and while he longed to pour into her confiding heart the

misery of his awakened conscience, and make her feel that he had repented, he could no longer dare to look forward. Death, like a strong man armed had bound him—his strength was evidently failing fast—he thought he could not live to see her, although she was willing to receive him. Nehemiah stood by, and attempted to comfort him. Sometimes he would speak of the Divine mercy;—sometimes of some favorable symptom in his patient's health; sometimes he reminded him of the unchanged affection of his wife.

"Tell me not of Agnes;" exclaimed the Unbeliever, bitterly, "I have wooed Death instead of her, and death is mine!" he started up, and looking wildly at Nehemiah, added, "You have designated me an *Unbeliever;* think you that there are not truths which I believe and hold to with my whole heart? Hear me, I believe in suffering, disease, and death; and in Hell, the hell of oppression and misery—yes, and in a devil—a devil unbound, too—the devil of an evil destiny, who is going about like an angel of destruction, seeking whom he may devour on the earth:—all these things I see, and believe."

"I know it," said the Quaker, turning to the unhappy invalid, "I know it, Wallace Arnold; for the devil is thy God, and him to whom thou doest homage. Verily, thy creed is no gospel, and I pity thee from my soul!"

"Can you do nothing to lengthen my days?" enquired Wallace.

Nehemiah shook his head,—his heart sunk as he beheld a fellow creature sinking in the last stage of a mortal malady, yet clinging fast to life, and struggling with

the destroyer as with a cruel assassin. "Be at peace," he said, after a short pause, "and be content to fall powerless into the hands of Him, in whom, I as much as thou, 'live and move and have my being.' Oh, that thou hadst but faith in that glorious revelation which teaches man,—feeble dying man, who cannot add one cubit to his stature, or make one hair of his head white or black,—to repose in the Father of the universe, before whom not even a sparrow falls to the ground unobserved"—

"Can you do nothing to lengthen my days?" earnestly repeated the Unbeliever.

"Wherefore enquire of me, as if I were a God to kill or to make alive? There is an appointed time for man to die; and when once the decree is gone forth, none but He who can resist the unalterable laws of nature"—

"Oh, do not bewilder me with your religious vagaries!" said Wallace, beseechingly, and yet impatiently; "Tell me, as you are acquainted with medicine, and have walked the hospitals, if you can save my life."

Nehemiah turned away, and for some seconds made no answer.

"You cannot tell me?" said Wallace, enquiringly.

"I tell thee, Wallace Arnold, that thou art a dying man," said Nehemiah, calmly, "and in a few more months, at the latest, thy mortal days will be ended."

The Unbeliever made no reply. The agony of suspense was over; and like one under sentence of death, he ceased to look upon life as his own. Nehemiah left him, and he retired to rest.

He lay upon his bed, but sleep departed from his eyes. Quick as the vivid play of lightning his mind re-touched the scenes and changes of his past life—his infancy—the beautiful Spring of life, when hope like the "living green" of nature, covered the whole earth, and heaven was above him—the fair blue sky veiling the home of good men;—then, passing by his school-boy days, he thought of his youth,—of his connection with Dr. Fleetwood, and of the old man's unexpected death. And he, too—the disciple and protêgê—who, but a few short years before, had stood by the dying man's pillow, and felt how hard it is to be bidden to return to the kindred dust, ere yet desire fails, or the wheels of life are weary, or the years are come when it shall be said, "I have no pleasure in them;"—could it be that *he* must so soon follow into the same abyss of uncertainty—beholding his purposes broken off, even in the midst of his years?

To die, without hope,—to return from the busy scenes of human life, as into the darkness of the womb, and be shut up in an eternal prison house—to sleep, and dream no dreams, nor trust to see again the morning light, and awake to happy consciousness—to leave a world of love and hope for the silence of annihilation—surely, there is no need for the terrors of a second death to reduce the mind of the Unbeliever even to despair!

At length he fell asleep, but images which had filled his imagination in his wakeful hours, still floated in his mind. He dreamed that he was dead—that the dark pall covered him, and that a train of mourners were bearing his senseless body to the grave—slowly and with

measured steps, he thought he saw the gloomy procession moving on until they reached the church, and rested in front of the altar—then, as in the silence of midnight, he heard a voice, proclaiming, "I am the Resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live!" He started—a thrill of hope darted through his mind; and struggling to free himself from the hands of the destroyer, he awoke.

The darkness had now passed away, and morning—cheerful morning—was pouring its beautiful sunshine into his room. "Blessed be God, for the light of day!" said Nehemiah, who was already standing by the invalid's bed.

"I thought that I was dead, that I was at my own funeral!" said Wallace, smiling.

"How is thy health?" enquired Nehemiah.

The Unbeliever made no reply. "I would not," he said, "shrink from the resistless decrees of Nature; but after all, death is a terrible mystery, from the contemplation of which there is no relief but in insensibility."

"Does thee think so? Such, then, are thy short-sighted notions," said Nehemiah, calmly. "The strong man," he added, after a pause, "is appalled at the curse he has invoked upon himself. Death is not one of God's works, but a *curse;* and as such, we instinctively shrink from it. 'By man came death.'"

"But death," said Wallace, "is not a vague notion of something in the distance—an idea floating in the imagination—but a reality, as stern and fearful a reality as life itself."

"There are greater realities than these;" said Nehemiah, "has thee never felt, even with regard to an earthly object, that there is a love that is strong as death?"

Wallace looked at him and sighed, for the sentiment had found an echo in his heart.

"And Religion is love," Nehemiah continued, "I do protest unto thee, Wallace, by the zeal and labors of Apostles and Evangelists, and the blood of martyrs and confessors, and the toils and sacrifices of the Christian church militant here on earth, for eighteen hundred years,—but let our yea, be yea, and our nay, nay,—I appeal to my own heart and aver, that there is no human affection stronger than the love of a Christian to his ascended Lord. Man is not a mere child of intellect, but of passion; and wonder not that the religion which is designed for him, should be adapted to his own nature —but I will leave thee to thy toilette."

He retired to the garden below. It was some time before Wallace joined him, and when he did, he leaned upon the arm of his servant.

"God's universe is full of love and beauty this morning," said Nehemiah meeting him at the door. "Let us kneel down in silence, and worship"—

"Worship what?" said the Unbeliever.

"Infinite *Goodness*," replied Nehemiah.

Wallace hesitated, but made no answer.

"What!" said Nehemiah, "art thou thine own keeper then?—hast thou yet to learn that there is a power stronger than thou art, and which must prevail?—hast thou yet to learn that thine own feeble and oscillating

will, driven this way or that according to circumstances, is not the guiding star of thy destiny?—thou art struggling only to feel the length of thy chain, and shalt sink exhausted with the effort. I ask thee not to worship God, as the Christians; for 'God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth;' but fall prostrate before the power above thee, whose wonderful name thou hast not yet learnt." Nehemiah knelt down upon the green grass, and covered his face with his hat, Wallace stood by him in silence.

"Alas!" said his companion, turning sorrowfully away, after the lapse of a few seconds, "he does not believe that goodness is infinite."

Wallace again retired to his own room; and for the first time during his long absence from Agnes, he determined to write to her. A few sentences extracted from his letter will display the gloomy and unsettled state of his feelings.

* * * *

"My heart tells me that we shall see and embrace each other once more in this world of sense;—but write to me, directly, if it be but a single line, for I feel that my days are numbered, and soon—very soon I must lie down in sorrow.

Bless you, dearest Agnes, for your unaltered affection for me. You have been my guardian angel from my youth,—you alone bound me to life or I had long since perished by my own hand; and now, we are one by a union so dear and intimate, that distance and time, the wide ocean or the everlasting hills shall never separate us.

* * * * *

A single word upon the subject, which has occupied your own mind for years; for I have learnt at last, that although a living man may doubt, dark is the passage to the grave, unless illumined by the hope of immortality. I have had an opportunity of reading all, or nearly all, the books which you once recommended. I have been pleased and aroused alternately. I acknowledge that the reasoning of ——— and ——— is unanswerable; but yet I am not persuaded—I am staggered at the difficulties. I see as much as a *peradventure* in Christianity—the story of Jesus and the resurrection may, haply be true; but again, I ask myself, can the eternal fate of myriads be suspended upon their belief in a story, the truth of which is involved in such obscurity? —a story which is left after all as a mere conjecture?— Oh Agnes, I am miserable—I am miserable—existence hangs heavily upon me—life itself is become a burden, and death a fearful reality. I look forward, and shudder at the darkness that lies in prospect—darkness which stretches itself from time to eternity—but, still, I cannot follow the light of revelation lest it should prove only the ignis fatuus of man's imagination. I know that you would say, 'the religion of the gospel is pure and beautiful, and come what may in the resistless order of our destiny, we can lose nothing, by surrendering ourselves to an influence, which throws its gladdening halo over this transitory life, by connecting it with a world beyond the tomb,—with Heaven.'

With heaven—but why do I speak of heaven, with

whom the name is but an empty unmeaning sound? Must I not lose the idea of heaven with the happy dreams of my childhood—the visions of golden streets, and pearly fountains, and gardens of paradise, that delighted my imagination in infancy?—I must, and yet I cannot; let it be illusion—the idea sooths the irritation of the mind, and is sweet and refreshing amid the sorrows of life—grateful, as the breath of flowers in a sick room. Still, I can think of heaven only as a beautiful deception—the solace of declining intellect, old age, and death; and though I cling with childish fondness to the idea, I am ashamed of my weakness. I would stand erect and behold the stern reality of Truth. What avails it, if the gospel is beautiful, if it be only a beautiful fiction?—No, let me dream on my wretched existence, as an *Unbeliever*;—let me speculate and reason until the cold damp of death shall steal over my fevered brain, and still its inquisitiveness for ever;—let me not live and die a lie. I have gone doubting even to the grave, and I will now lie down to sleep eternally."

* * * * *

But Wallace did not understand that his way was not in himself; "that it is not in him that walketh to direct his steps." He knew not the depth of those feelings which he here struggles with and despises, nor how his new desires after immortality "gave affirmation of their own success," and prepared his mind for the reception of divine truth; he was not left to the folly of his own wisdom. From about the time when this letter was written, a new era in his life commenced; but it was

destined to be very short. His had been a day of darkness and of tempest; but at eventide, there was light—the clouds moved off; and his sun rose just to throw a transient gleam of brightness over the last feeble steps of his pilgrimage, and went down for ever.—For ever? —no, we retract the word; for although cold, and spiritually dead,—stretched already upon the bier and bound hand and foot with grave clothes, he had been born before the altar of the Eternal,—he had heard the voice of Him, at whose command all that are in their graves shall at last come forth; and awakening from the sleep of nature, he *believed* and *lived*.

The conversion of a sinner bears, perhaps in every single case, a different aspect; but we shall pass over this, the most important and interesting event in the life of our Unbeliever, without attempting either to explain or analyse his feelings. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth—so is every one that is born of the spirit." We shall content ourselves with stating, simply, that Truth came home at last to the heart of the unhappy Wallace; and he who had long hardened himself against conviction,—who had been a skeptic, an athiest,—an Unbeliever both in God and man,—was enabled to receive that Divine revelation, he had for years labored to destroy, and to repose with his whole soul on the once despised doctrine of "Salvation by grace through faith."

CHAPTER XVII.

"And such is human life;—so gliding on,
It glimmers like a meteor and is gone!
Yet is the tale, brief though it be, as strange,
As full methinks of wild and wondrous change,
As any song of old, in hall or bower,
To minstrell harps at midnight's watching hour!"

And now, we will return to Clifton; for, "lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come." Spring—beautiful, genial spring—has revisited us, in her own virgin green,—the trees are budding into new life, and showers of white blossoms tremble in the breeze. Earth has burst from her chrysalis state, thrown off her wintry habiliments as the cerements of death, and appears again in her resurrection robes; and man hears the voice of God, proclaiming as of old, in the harmony of nature, "I will no more curse the ground for his sake, while the earth remaineth; seed time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease."

Do you wish to know how our friends at the Rectory had passed this winter?—It was a time of unusual scarcity and deprivation among the villagers of Clifton; for the population is composed mainly of poor laborers, dependent for their daily bread upon their six days toil in the field; and early in the month of December, a few heavy falls of snow, followed by several weeks of hard

frost, had fairly sealed up the ground, and defied the efforts of the agriculturist. There lay the cold earth, veiled like a vestal virgin, in her chaste white robes, and gave no signs of life; and curious enough it was, to see the cottages or farm houses laid in with a flaky thatch much thicker than their own, and the hills glittering in the distance like avalanches, while the busy, murmuring river was frozen into silence.

During this interval of the suspension of agricultural labour, Agnes and her friends were assiduously employed in attempts for the relief of the poor—the barrenness of nature gave daily impulse to their exertions; even Mrs. Smith, notwithstanding her domestic habits and love of home duties, contrived to spend several hours of each day in attending to the wants of the parishioners; the children were taught the luxury of self sacrifice, for the sake of others; and Agnes, like a sister of mercy, devoted her time, her fortune, her influence, to works of benevolence; suggested new schemes of charity and carried them into effect herself; often rising ere the dull dawn of a winter's morning blinked through its heavy mists and fogs, to visit the neighbouring hamlets, and minister with her own hands to the relief of the sick or the destitute.—After such a morning, would the day come, with its train of busy cares and pleasures; and then, evening, 'gentle evening, season of peace,' returning, and continuing long; and oh, we feel half inclined to stay and loiter over the fire-side, where, while the hollow wind whistles in the chimney, the long crimson window curtains are drawn close, and the evening

lamp shines upon happy faces, and the playful prattle of infancy is intermixed with the thoughtful tone of manhood, or the voice of woman's sympathy and kindness,—but we must hasten on, for all this is in nowise connected with our story about an Unbeliever.

Mr. Smith had apprised Agnes of the expected return of her husband, on his receiving the first intimation of it; and it was afterwards arranged by himself and Nehemiah that he should proceed at once to the Clifton Rectory. His wife,—who had now received several letters from him, and was fully acquainted with the state of his health and feelings,—had determined to meet him in the South, but as she was still somewhat indisposed, and utterly unfit for the excitement of travelling, she was wisely kept in suspense as to the precise time of his arrival in England. A brief messsage, conveyed by the Clifton carrier, at length announced that Arnold and Nehemiah were already in the neighbouring town, and might be expected at the Rectory in the course of the afternoon; and Mr. Smith, with all possible caution, communicated the intelligence to Agnes.

But, although thus prepared for it, she could scarcely support the mingled sensations of hope and fear to which it gave rise. She threw herself upon the sofa,—talked calmly to her friends of his returning, only to wither in her arms,—and endeavoured to appear composed; but every noise startled her, and her ears eagerly caught the first sound of carriage wheels upon the smooth sand of the lane adjoining the house. Mrs. Smith would have detained her, but she ran into the garden and look-

ed anxiously towards the B ——— road. A heavy travelling carriage was moving slowly—very slowly towards the Rectory,—it came close up to the place where she was standing. Agnes leant against the garden gate and looked up—she recognised at once the quaintly attired Nehemiah, but the pale, emaciated stranger, with his heavy dark eyes—who was he? She shrank back as the carriage turned through the gate, and the stranger feebly raised his head and his dark eyes met hers. Agnes knew him, but she became faint and cold, her head swam, and she sank senseless to the ground.

* * * * * *

It was evening—a gentle summer's evening—calm and sunshiny as when Wallace and Agnes stood together in the church-yard in the spring of the preceding year, when death seemed under their feet, a heaven of serene love above their heads, and earth stretched out before them, like a garden of paradise. Only a few brief months had passed, and here they met again—the living and the dying—but heaven was in their hearts, and immortality before them.

We cannot tell you *how* they met; for assuredly, it were worse than sacrilege to rend asunder the veil, and penetrate into the very holy of holies of the human heart, that we may pry with curious gaze into its secrets. Theirs was a joy with which we cannot intermeddle, unless like them we have been alienated from a friend, dear as our own soul, and have again embraced in the love of reconciliation. We will leave Agnes and Wallace in the twilight of the evening, and close the door

upon them; for the hour of separation approaches, and our story is well-nigh ended.

* * * *

That same night—a few hours after Mr. and Mrs. Smith had retired to bed—Fanny, who was exceedingly restless, awoke her husband and desired that he would go down stairs and enquire after Mr. Arnold, for she felt anxious both about him and Agnes. Smith roused himself, accordingly, and attempted to strike a light with some lucifer matches which lay on the dressing-table, but was unsuccessful. He then drew aside the window curtains —it was the still hour of midnight, and the faint light of the moon looked down through the white mist—not an object was visible from the window but the church spire peering as from the clouds, and the dark yew stretching out its arms like a gigantic spectre among the tombs. Smith went softly down stairs into the breakfast room, where he had left the invalid. Wallace was reclining upon the sofa, he was apparently asleep, and breathing with great difficulty. Agnes was seated upon a footstool, her arms thrown round him, and her head leaning against his shoulder. Nehemiah stood by them, like a guardian angel; observing Smith, he beckoned to him to stay, and the Rector turned towards Agnes and gently recommended her to try to obtain some rest. Agnes neither spoke nor moved; she knew that she was in the chamber of death; and she felt like one, standing on the very brink of the troubled Jordan, and as if the waters were low, and the distance between earth and heaven were but a step.

A few minutes elapsed, and then Wallace opened his eyes, as if seeking for some one. Agnes raised her head and looked at him with affection; but he could not see her or return her expression of fondness, for his eyes were already glazed. Agnes started up—a shade of helpless sorrow passed over her pale face, and her breast heaved convulsively, as if she were struggling with some strong internal emotion—she hesitated a moment, and again bending over him, laid her hand upon his heart. Wallace smiled faintly, and once more he feebly opened his eyes, then raising his arms with the last convulsive energy of a dying man, he clasped them round her; in the same instant his head fell against hers, and she was locked in the heavy embrace of death.

* * * * * *

Agnes was removed from her husband's couch to her own room in a state of insensibility, in which she continued for some hours. When she came to herself, Nehemiah was still standing by her side, but Mr. Smith, and his wife had again retired to rest.

"Let me go down stairs to him," was her first earnest appeal.

"Yes, none shall hinder," said Nehemiah, gently, "thou shalt go down and see what a holy thing death is, when we see it in the form of one we love,—thou shalt gaze upon the sculptured image of thy departed one as long as nature permits; and when she asserts her right to the kindred dust, thou shalt follow him to the grave, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."

"But I would die with him, for assuredly my day's work is done."

"Not yet; haply it is hardly begun," said Nehemiah. "It remains now for thee to crowd the work of two lives into one—thy sun is but rising, and thou art only in thy early youth. A glorious mission is before thee—arise and fulfil it, for though thou hast died with thy beloved thou shalt yet return both with fear and joy from the sepulchre, to finish thy allotted work and his. Blessed are they, who thus bury their earthly hopes even in the morning of life—whose love is in heaven, while they linger here below—to whom gladness or sorrow, life and death, the changes of the seasons, or the morning sunshine, point, like our Christian festival, to heaven and the Resurrection."

He supported her, and she accompanied him to the room below; and now, the sun—the gay morning sun—fell upon the pale corpse, and the summer flies floated in the room. Agnes shrank back appalled, but quickly recovering herself, she came close up to the senseless image of the lost, and pressed her lips to his cold forehead. Nehemiah waited till the fresh gush of feeling occasioned by the first shock at the sight of death had subsided; then, drawing her to the further end of the room and pointing to the red beams of the sun, as it rose to shine over a whole heaven of blue sky, he said, "I believe in Jesus and the Resurrection."

THE END.

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